



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 70.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S SECRET CAMP

OR
TRAILING THE CLOVEN HOOF



BY THE
AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

THE RIFLES OF BUFFALO BILL AND HIS FOE CRACKED ALMOST AS ONE, AND THE OUTLAW REELED AND FELL FROM HIS SADDLE.



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CHAPTER I.

A GIRL'S PLUCK.

The coaches that ran to and from Last Chance, a mining town on the extreme frontier of the middle West, generally had a pretty hard time of it. There were rough roads, washouts, Indians and, worse than all, there were organized bands of outlaws, the presence of which on the trail made travel doubly dangerous.

It is true that at the time we speak of Buffalo Bill had just succeeded in capturing and killing a number of the outlaws and breaking up their band, but for all that, travel on the stage line was so dangerous that none of the regular drivers could be persuaded to take the coach through.

A brave young fellow named Harding, one of Buffalo Bill's scouts, had taken the coach through in safety to its terminal, and was on his way back. The relay station at W—, where he changed horses and where he stopped over night, was connected by several coach lines with points further east, but passengers seldom came that way, and Harding went to bed thinking that on the morrow he would have a lonely drive, through a wild country, to Last Chance.

The coaches that came in from the South and East the

next morning, however, brought valuable mail for Last Chance, but, to the surprise of all, a lady passenger.

She was a young lady, and veiled, but enough was seen of her face to reveal its beauty, while her form was of faultless mold.

She was dressed in perfect keeping for one on a long journey, and carried only a small trunk with her.

She told the station agent that her name was Celeste Seldon, and that she had come West for the purpose of searching for her father, and to find the whereabouts of a young friend.

The last she had heard of her father was in a letter dated from W—.

"I wrote you, Mr. Agent," she said, in her sweet way, "asking about a young man, Bernard Brandon by name, who had come West upon a special mission.

"You replied that he had been to W—, and gone on from here to Last Chance, a mining camp, and though I have written there, no response came, so I decided to come myself and investigate.

"Have you heard anything more of Mr. Brandon?"

The agent looked troubled, and seeing it, she said, quickly:

"You have heard of him, so I beg you to tell me all."

"I regret to say, miss, that he was wounded on his way

to Last Chance, shot by road-agents; but here is Harding, the driver of the Last Chance coach, and he can tell you all."

Harding did not appear to like having to give pain to the young girl, but he frankly told her that the young man she sought had been wounded by outlaws in a recent hold-up, and that the bullet, striking his head, had made him a maniac.

"I will go to him. When do you start, sir?"

"This afternoon, miss; but the trail is a very dangerous one, and I had better bring him back with me."

"No, I will go with you, and I will speak for the box seat, if it is not engaged."

"Oh, no, no seats are engaged, for all dread the trail between here and Last Chance."

"I do not, so I ride with you, sir, on the box seat," was the determined reply of the young girl.

She paid her fare, and when the coach started, after having dinner at the agent's, mounted to the box with Harding's aid, and took her seat by the young driver, while the crowd yelled lustily as they drove off to face the dangers of the Dead Line Trail.

Harding drove off with the air of one who felt his full responsibility in having the care of a young and beautiful girl, who dared risk the dangerous road he had to travel.

He found that his fair companion, as soon as she left the settlement, was very beautiful, for she removed her veil when only having to be gazed upon by one person, and that one a very handsome young man.

It did not take her very long to discover that her companion, though driving an Overland coach, was above the average she had thus far met with among the Western wilds, for he was polite, well informed, and his courage was proven by what he was then doing, for Miss Seldon had been told by the agent just what trouble they had had on the line.

The night relay was reached, and as there had been no expectation of ever accommodating young ladies, no provision had been made for them, so Harding and the stock-tender yielded the cabin to the fair passenger, while they occupied a shanty near by.

The stock-tender exerted himself to make her comfortable, and to provide the best supper and breakfast his larder would allow.

"What a surprise they will get in Last Chance when they see her, pard. Why, them miners will make a god-dess of her, whatever that may be," said the stock-tender.

"Yes, if we only get through, pard, for do you know I am more anxious now than when I am alone?"

"Why is that?"

"Well, I have my reasons; but let me tell you that I mean to fight on this run if we are held up," and the eyes of the young driver flashed fire.

The next morning the coach started upon its way half an hour earlier than usual, and Harding pushed his horses along at a far faster pace than they were accustomed to.

For some reason he seemed anxious to get by the Dead Line—as the spot where the outlaws generally held up the coaches was known—far ahead of time, and to push on into Last Chance with all speed that was possible.

He found his fair charge most entertaining, and she asked him all about life in the Wild West, and he was surprised to discover how much she knew of the frontier and its characters.

She spoke of army officers known to her well by name, mentioned Buffalo Bill as a hero well known in the East, and seemed anxious to glean all the information she could of the strange country into which she had ventured.

At last she touched upon the cause of her coming, and her face saddened as she said:

"It grieves me deeply to learn of the sad result of Mr. Brandon's wound, though I cannot but feel, as you say, that he is bodily strong, that something can be done to restore his mind.

"He came here on a mission for me, to find my father, who, I will confess to you, was driven West by pretended friends and false misrepresentations that kept him here, as though he had been the veriest criminal hiding from justice.

"But it is not so, and I long to find my father and restore him to his home and those who love him.

"Have you ever heard of him here?—his name was Andrew Seldon."

"No, Miss Seldon, I never have heard the name, that I now recall.

"Where was he when you last heard of him?"

"Several letters came into my possession long after they were written, for I have not seen my father for seven long years, and I was a little girl then, and the last of those letters was mailed at W——.

"In it he stated that he had been in the mining country, had been most successful, and would come home within a year or two.

"But this letter did not come to my hands directly, and it was answered by others, his enemies and mine, and so I, upon learning the truth, and of a cruel plot against him and myself, got Mr. Brandon to come and look him up that he might know all.

"As a dread came, upon receiving the agent's letter, that harm had befallen Mr. Brandon, I decided to come at once to the West myself, for I was reared on a plantation, am a good rider, have been inured to hardships and can handle firearms when there is need for them, so I was fitted for just such a trip as I am now taking; but here I am making a confidant of you, Mr. Harding, when I should be keeping my own counsel."

"Oh, no, I am glad to know more of you, and it may be in my power to aid you, for I will gladly do all in my power for you."

"I feel that, and we will be friends; but why do you look so anxious?"

"Do I?"

"Yes, you do."

"Well, to be candid, I am anxious for your sake, not mine, for I half dread trouble on this run, and we are nearing the scene of several tragedies and which the miners call the Dead Line.

"Will you not ride in the coach now?"

"No, I take all chances with you and remain where I am," was the plucky reply of Celeste Seldon.

CHAPTER II.

MASKED FOES.

The brave response of Celeste Seldon pleased the young miner, though he did not wish her to remain upon the box.

He knew the merciless nature of the road-agents, and

that if they fired without challenging him, she stood in as much danger as he did of being killed or wounded.

So he said:

"I would much rather that you should go inside the coach, especially until we pass the Dead Line."

"No, I remain here."

"You are determined?"

"I am."

"Then I can say no more, and I think, recognizing that I have a lady with me, they will not fire upon me."

"Have you much of value with you?"

"I have considerable money in bank notes for miners at Last Chance."

"Is it too bulky for me to hide?"

"I think not, miss."

"Then let me try it."

A halt was made and the money was taken from its hiding-place.

The young girl asked:

"Do you know the amount that is here?"

"Yes, miss, it is stated here," and he handed out a paper.

"I will take the paper and the money, for I can hide it," and with this she put it in a silk bag that she carried and fastened it securely beneath the skirt of her dress.

Feeling relieved on this point, Harding drove on and soon after came in sight of the Dead Line.

He had just come up level with the cross that marked the fatal spot of former tragedies, and was talking to his team, which showed much nervousness at passing a scene which they realized as one to dread, when loud rang out a voice:

"Hold hard, Harding, or you are a dead man!"

Not a soul was visible among the rocks or in the trees, and Harding had it flash through his mind to make a dash, when quickly the hand of the young girl was laid upon his arm and she said, firmly:

"Obey!"

"I must do so," was the low reply, for the young man realized that it would bring a volley upon them to attempt to dash through.

So his foot went hard down upon the brake, as he pulled his horses up and the stage came to a halt.

"Make your lines fast around the brake and hands up now!" came the order from the unseen foe.

"You must obey," said Celeste Seldon, as the driver hesitated.

With a muttered imprecation Harding obeyed, and then out from the thicket came a horseman.

His horse was enveloped in a black blanket that gave him the appearance of the steeds of the knights of old, robed out in mail, for his ears, head and neck were covered and it fell to his knees.

The covering was over the saddle, too, so that it as well as the bridle was concealed.

The horseman wore a black robe like a domino, shielding his form completely, and his face was covered by a red, close-fitting mask, while a cowl covered his head.

"The devil on horseback," muttered Harding, as he beheld the man, and right there he made up his mind that if he was the sole one who held up the coach, he would watch his chance, if he could get Celeste Seldon away from his side, and try a duel with him for mastery.

But this hope died away when, as though suspecting the intention of Harding, the horseman called out:

"Come, men, and let us get to work."

Silently there came out of the thicket now half-a-dozen men on foot, but all enveloped in black robes, wearing red masks, and with their feet clad in moccasins, while a quick glance at the hoofs of the horse ridden by the chief showed that he had muffles on, to prevent making a track.

The young girl seated by the side of Harding calmly surveyed the scene, and her sympathy seemed to be with the young driver, who, she could see, felt the situation keenly.

The half-dozen men appearing at the call of their chief seemed to be well trained, for two of them went to the heads of the horses, two more to either door of the coach, and the others awaited orders.

The horseman rode close up to the side of the coach, his hand upon his revolver.

"Harding, I see that you meditate resistance if opportunity offers, but let me warn you that you are a dead man the instant you make any attempt to escape or fire upon us.

"I would kill you now without the slightest hesitation, only I fear it would break up the line and travel to Last Chance, and that I do not wish.

"Dismount from that box, and remember, my revolver covers you!"

Harding obeyed in sullen silence.

"Now, what freight have you on?"

"I have the mails, and this lady passenger, but, low as you are, you will not rob her, I hope."

"There was money sent through by you to Last Chance."

"You pretend to know this, but I have no money for Last Chance."

"I know better."

"There is the coach; search it; but let me tell you, if you touch the United States mails you will have every soldier stationed at W—— and at Faraway on your track."

"I believe you are right about that, and I do not care to fight the government by robbing the mails; but the money I want."

"I have not got any, I told you."

"I do not believe you."

"Then find it."

"I will."

A thorough search of the coach was made, and then the driver was searched but without any money being found.

"I know that the sum of thirty thousand dollars was to be sent by you to the miners in Last Chance."

"You know this?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Never mind, but I know it."

"Well, you see that your spy misinformed you."

"As the money cannot be found it is a dead loss to me, and I hold you responsible."

"All right, I am."

"But, as I said, if I kill you no man will be found to take your place——"

"Oh, yes, Dr. Dick will."

Dr. Dick was a well-known character in Last Chance, where he was the surgeon. He was a reckless man and idolized by the rough miners there.

"D— Dr. Dick—I beg pardon, miss, but he refers to one whom I hate, and some day will be avenged upon," said the outlaw.

"Well, if you kill me you will have the chance, for he will drive."

"With even that hope to get even with him, I will not kill you, yet I must have that money or a hostage."

"Take me, then."

"No, I could not realize the amount on you."

"Then do without."

"Not I, when there is a hostage at hand."

"Who?"

"This lady."

"Coward! you would not dare."

"Won't I? Then see, for that lady becomes my prisoner until I receive that money."

"What money?"

"The thirty thousand you beat me out of to-day."

"How can you get it by taking me with you?" asked Celeste Sheldon, quietly.

"Why, very easily, miss."

"How so, may I ask?"

"Harding will go on to Last Chance and report that I have you as my prisoner, to hold until the miners pay me the sum of—well, I'll add interest, so call it thirty-five thousand dollars."

"The miners have nothing to do with me, sir; they do not even know me."

"That does not matter, for they are a gallant lot of men, rough though they may look, and many of them be, so, when it is known what I have done, they will chip in generously and the money will be raised very quickly."

"How will you get it?" asked Harding.

"I will meet you on any day we may agree upon, at this spot, with this lady, and you will come alone, as I will, and the exchange of the hostage for the money will be made."

"If you come with others, or attempt treachery, I swear to you I will kill the girl before your eyes, so if you wish to have that done, play traitor, while, if you act squarely with me, all will be well."

"What do you say?"

"I will say, as it cannot be otherwise, I will be your hostage until the money is paid you," said Celeste Sheldon, firmly.

CHAPTER III.

THE SACRIFICE.

The plucky stand taken by Celeste Sheldon won the admiration of Harding at once.

He did not understand why she had been so prompt in her reply, so willing to at once yield herself as a hostage until a ransom was received for her release.

But she did offer, and he at once decided what he should do.

So he said:

"See here, cutthroat, I have something to say to you."

"Well, out with it, but be more choice in your epithets bestowed on me, if you wish to keep in good health."

"What! don't like the name, eh? Well, I called you by a name that denotes your calling."

"What have you to say?"

"Just this, that if you will allow this young lady to ride on to Last Chance, on one of my stage-horses, for he will carry her safely there, I will remain your hostage until Landlord Larry sends the money out to you which you demand."

"As a hostage you are of no value, but the lady is."

"Well, again?"

"What is it?"

"If I pay you the amount you said was to be sent by me, will you let the lady go?"

"When will you pay it?"

"Now."

"Do so, and I will let the lady go free."

"No, no, sir; you have not the money," cried Celeste to Harding.

"Yes, miss; I can make it good, for altogether I have a little more saved up than he demands, and I can start over again to lay up a fortune, you see, for I am young yet."

"I will not consent to that, except that I return you the money, my kind friend, for I am well able to do so, as I am by no means a poor girl."

"I will recompense you, by paying you back my ransom."

"We will not quarrel on that score, miss, so give him the money," said Harding.

Celeste turned, and raising her skirt, took the bag of money from its hiding-place.

This she handed to Harding who threw it at the masked outlaw's feet with the remark:

"Your spy informed you correctly; there is the money; just thirty-two thousand dollars."

"Thank you," and he quietly counted the money before he spoke again.

"Yes, it is all here."

"Now, miss, had Harding ransomed you, it was your intention to have repaid him, you said?"

"By all means, for I have no claim upon that brave gentleman."

"You are able to pay back so large a ransom, are you?"

"Had I not been able to pay it back, I would not have made the offer to do so."

"You have not got the money with you?"

"Oh, no; I am no traveling bank, nor am I a fool."

"Well said; but as you are able to pay a ransom for yourself, I shall hold you a prisoner until you pay me the money I demand."

An oath burst involuntarily from the lips of Harding at this treachery on the part of the road-agent, while the young girl turned pale with momentary dread.

But she said, firmly:

"After receiving the money you demanded, and which I feel it my duty to pay back, as it is really my ransom, will you be so vile, so lost to all manhood, as to enforce your words against me?"

"What more can you expect of one who has no character, who is already lost, body and soul?"

"Oh, no; I have no conscience, so do not appeal to me, for all I wish in the world is gold, and that I will have, no matter who the victim, what the means I have to take to get it."

"You are, indeed, lost to every human feeling."

"So I said, and you are my prisoner until this man Harding brings me, well, say, thirty thousand dollars' ransom money for your safe delivery to him once more.

"Now, miss; I will take your baggage along, for you may need it, and you will go with me."

"Where will you take me?"

"To my retreat, and you will be treated with respect; but money I must have.

"As for you, Harding, go on to Last Chance and raise the money for this lady's ransom.

"Give it to Dr. Dick, and let him come with you in your coach on your next run out.

"Halt just here, and he will be met by one of my men with this lady.

"If others come, her life shall be the forfeit.

"When my messenger receives the money, this lady shall be given into the charge of Dr. Dick.

"Do you understand?"

"I do, and you will understand that all of Last Chance, every man capable of carrying a gun, will be upon your trail before night."

"Just let any one pursue me, and instead of finding me, you will discover the dead body of this young girl in the trail awaiting you. Remember, I am not to be followed, or intimidated. Do you understand now?"

Harding made no reply, for he was too much overcome to speak; but the small leather trunk belonging to Celeste Seldon having been taken from the coach, along with a side saddle and bridle she had brought with her, the driver clasped her hand in farewell.

As he grasped her hand, unable himself to speak, for his emotion at being unable to protect the girl overcame him, Celeste Seldon said:

"I would like to have a word with this gentleman."

She spoke to the masked chief, who replied:

"Before me, yes."

"Very well, I have no secret to make known to him, so you may hear."

Then, turning to Harding, she continued:

"You have been most kind to me, sir, and I appreciate it. You have done all in your power for me, no one could do more; but let me say to you, if you can raise the sum demanded by this—this—robber, do so, and every dollar shall be refunded to you within a few days after my return East."

"The men won't ask it, miss."

"But I shall pay it.

"Now, to the reason in part of my coming here."

"Yes, miss."

"Try to find out for me among the miners, if a man by the name of Andrew Seldon is known to any of them, and if so, where he is."

"I will."

"Try also to do all in your power for that poor young man, Bernard Brandon, who, you told me, had been crazed by a bullet wound, doubtless given by this very—murderer."

"Yes, I shot him, and killed Dave Dockery, the driver, and a miner at the same time," was the remark of the masked road-agent, delivered with the utmost effrontery.

"You seem proud of your red work, sir."

"Yes, killing is a trade with me just now."

Celeste Seldon turned from him with disgust and horror, and, addressing Harding, continued:

"Ask the one you spoke of as Dr. Dick to do all in his power for that poor sufferer, and he shall be well rewarded for it.

"When I am released I will go to Last Chance, as it was my intention, and do all I can to find my father, and minister to the sufferings of poor Mr. Brandon.

"Now, I thank you once more, and bid you good-by."

Harding clasped her hand, dared not to trust himself to speak, but there were volumes in the look of intense hatred he cast upon the masked face of the road-agent chief.

Then he mounted to the stage-box, gathered up his lines and drove away in a silence that was most expressive.

He glanced back as he came to the end of the canyon, but saw that the road-agents and their fair prisoner had already disappeared.

Then the lash descended upon the backs of the startled horses, and the team was sent along at a pace that was most dangerous, indeed.

But Harding could only find vent for his pent-up feelings by rapid and reckless driving, and never before had the distance between the Dead Line and Last Chance been covered in the time in which he made it.

Notwithstanding his delay at the Dead Line, he went thundering up the valley half an hour ahead of time, and when he drew rein before the hotel his horses were reeking with foam and panting like hard-run hounds.

His face was white, his eyes ablaze with anger and indignation, and his teeth set firmly.

"Great God! Harding, what has happened?" cried Landlord Larry, the proprietor of the only hotel in Last Chance, in alarm.

Throwing the mail at the feet of the surprised landlord, Harding leaped to the ground, and said, hoarsely:

"Come, I wish to speak to you."

He led the way into the office and then told the whole story.

"We will mount a hundred men and go in pursuit at once," cried Larry.

"What! do you forget his threat?"

"What threat?"

"To kill the girl!"

"He will not do it."

"He will."

"No; he dare not."

"You do not know him—I do."

"Well, what is to be done?"

"Just what he demands."

"What! pay him?"

"By all means, and save the girl!"

"You are right."

"But have all ready then, the moment that she is safe, to throw five hundred mounted men on a hunt for him; have the entire country about the Dead Line surrounded; and then hunt him and his men to death," savagely said Harding.

"Yes; it must be done; but now to tell the men what has happened," and Landlord Larry went out, followed by Harding, to find a large crowd of miners gathered about the hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RANSOM.

Landlord Larry was considerably nonplused by what had been told him by Harding, and he hardly knew how to break the news to the miners.

Hundreds had assembled, for the mad race of Harding's team up the valley had told them that something had gone wrong.

So they had hurried in twos and by half-dozens to the hotel to hear what had happened.

They were more eager to learn it all when it was told how Harding had made no report, but had led Landlord Larry into the office and been closeted there with him an hour.

The panting horses had been led away to the stable, the mail had been opened by Landlord Larry's clerk, and many had gotten letters.

But the interest in letters was lost in the desire to learn what had happened on Harding's run in.

When the two men were seen coming out of the hotel, a wild yell greeted them.

Landlord Larry stepped out upon the piazza, and at once a silence fell upon the crowd, while every eye was turned upon the white face of Harding.

"Men, I have bad news for you," said Landlord Larry.

"The coach has been held up again, and thirty-two thousand dollars in money, given to driver Harding to bring to Last Chance, was taken.

"There are some forty of you who feel this loss, having sent your gold out to be exchanged for this money.

"But that is not the worst of it.

"The mails were not disturbed, as the road-agent said that he wished no trouble with the government.

"Nor is this all, for Harding had a passenger with him on this run—a young girl."

"Where is she?" came in a chorus of voices.

"I will tell you.

"There were seven road-agents, all masked, and their chief mounted.

"They held the coach up at the Dead Line, and they covered Harding with their rifles, and demanded the money which, in some way, they knew he had.

"The young lady had hidden it for him, but as she was to be held for ransom, she gave it up, and learning that she was rich, the road-agent chief then demanded ransom from her."

And, speaking slowly and distinctly, Landlord Larry went on to tell the whole story of the coach and taking of Celeste Seldon captive.

The crowd was as silent as death, except for the suppressed breathing of the men, and the bronzed faces of the miners paled and flushed by turns.

When at last it was told how a ransom of thirty thousand dollars was demanded, before a word had been said that it would be paid back, a yell arose:

"We'll raise it!"

"Good! That is just what I knew you would do, pards, and I will head the list with five hundred," said Landlord Larry.

"Put me down for five hundred," called out Harding, and the two offers were cheered, while a stern voice called out behind the landlord:

"Put me down for a thousand, Larry, for I have heard all that you have told the men."

It was Dr. Dick, the physician of the town, who was a great gambler, and known as the Gambler Gold King, who, seeing the crowd in front of the hotel, had come to the piazza by passing into the house through the rear door.

Another cheer greeted the sum named by Dr. Dick, and there arose cries on all sides as men pressed forward:

"I'll give a thousand, landlord!"

"Name me for fifty."

"Put me on the list for a hundred!"

"Twenty-five for me!"

And so on were the sums named by the noble-hearted and generous fellows, even those who had lost their money by the road-agents, subscribing, until Dr. Dick called out, for he had been keeping account:

"Hold on, all! The amount is already named.

"Now, men, form in line, and give your names as you pass along, and the money, those who have it."

It was late when the ransom list was made up, and the men had not heeded the supper gong until after they had paid their subscriptions.

Then Landlord Larry packed the money away, and the crowd dispersed to their various occupations and pleasures for the night, which may be set down as consisting principally of drinking and gambling.

This question, regarding the unfortunate girl who had fallen into the hands of the masked and merciless outlaws being settled, the driver said to Landlord Larry and Dr. Dick, who had returned to the office of the hotel:

"Now, I wish to see about the poor fellow whom that young girl was coming out to see, and also to learn about her father."

"Who was her father?" asked Landlord Larry.

"Her name is Celeste Seldon, and she wished me to ascertain if her father had ever been heard of in the mines.

"His name was Andrew Seldon."

"Andrew Seldon?" quickly said Dr. Dick.

"Yes."

"I know of such a man, or rather knew of him, for he is dead now," was the response of the Gambler Gold King.

A cloud passed over the face of Harding, and he remarked, sadly:

"That poor girl seems doomed to have sorrow dog her steps. But you knew her father, doctor?"

"Yes; I knew him long years ago, and I happen to learn of his being out here, working for a fortune in the mines, I believe."

"You are sure that it is the one she seeks?"

"The names are the same. The Andrew Seldon I knew was from Tennessee."

"So was her father, and he must be the man you refer to. But where did he die?"

"I'll tell you what I have not made known to others. Buffalo Bill and I struck a trail to see what the end would bring to us, and the night before we came to the end, those we sought were buried by the caving in of a mine which they were working under a cliff. One of those men was Andrew Seldon, and he had a companion with him."

"And they were killed?"

"Yes, buried under the cliff, that fell upon their cabin, destroying all."

"You must tell the story to the young girl, for I cannot, doctor."

"I will do so, though I hate to give a woman pain."

"Now, doctor, I wish to ask about the one she seeks here in Last Chance."

"Who is he, Harding?"

"The poor fellow you so devotedly cared for, but whose reason was destroyed by the wound he received from the road-agents."

"Ah, yes; poor fellow; his mind is irrevocably wrecked."

"Where is he?"

"Landlord Larry can tell you better than I, for he seems to avoid my cabin since I gave him up as a patient."

"He wanders about among the camps at will; but that reminds me that I have not seen him to-day," the landlord said.

"Is he the one the girl is coming to see?" asked Dr. Dick.

"Yes, and his name is Bernard Brandon. He came out here on a special mission for her, I suppose to find her father, and not hearing from him, she feared that he had gotten into trouble, so came West herself in search of him."

"Well, her coming may bring back his reason, though I doubt it."

"Will you not question him, doctor, telling him about her, and see if you cannot get him to talk rationally?"

"Certainly, Harding; but where is he?"

Landlord Larry asked his clerk about the man, but he had not seen him all day, and the miners being questioned, not one recalled having seen him since the day before.

In some dread that harm had befallen him, Harding then went out in search of the poor fellow.

He went from miner to miner and camp to camp in his vain search for the missing man, for not anywhere could he find any one who had seen him for over twenty-four hours.

Becoming really alarmed, when he realized the shock it would be to Celeste Seldon, whose hazardous and costly trip to the West would be utterly useless, Harding went back to the hotel to consult Dr. Dick and Landlord Larry about giving a general alarm.

These alarms were only given in times of direst need, for the miners were sworn to obey the call, and come from every camp and mine within the circuit of habitation about Last Chance.

The alarm was given by sending a mounted bugler to every prominent point in the valley, where he was to sound the rally three times.

A half-dozen positions thus visited would send the bugle notes into every camp of the valley, and it was the duty of all miners to at once strike for the place of assembly at the hotel, and give the warning to all others whom they saw.

Landlord Larry, hearing the story of Harding's fruitless search for the stranger, at once decided to order the alarm sounded without consulting Dr. Dick, who was not in his cabin.

So the bugler was called in, and, mounting a speedy

horse, he placed the bugle to his lips, and loud, clear and ringing resounded the "rally."

Then he dashed from point to point at the full speed of his horse, and within half an hour from half a dozen prominent positions, the bugle call assembling the miners had rung out and men were hastening to obey the summons.

The bugle call sent the miners from every point hastening to the hotel, and within an hour every man in Last Chance had reported at the assembling point, all eager to know the cause of the alarm.

Again Landlord Larry was the speaker, and he began by asking if the unfortunate stranger, whose wound had crazed him, was in the crowd.

Every eye was at once on the search for the man, but soon the reports came that Bernard Brandon was not in the crowd.

Then Landlord Larry made known that the mysterious disappearance, at the time of Miss Seldon's capture by the road-agents, was a coincidence so strange that it needed explanation.

Miss Seldon was coming to Last Chance to find that very young man, who had in turn come there in search of her father, and now, when she was a captive to the road-agents, to be given up only upon the payment of a large ransom, the stranger had most mysteriously disappeared.

The name of the young lady's father was Andrew Seldon, and if any miner present could tell aught regarding him, or had known such a man, the landlord wished him to come and tell him all that he could about him.

But it was the duty, and but justice, for one and all of them to set out on the search for the young stranger who had disappeared from their midst, and he wished to know if they would not take a day off and do so, for it might be that he had fallen and broken his leg, and was then lying suffering and deserving their sympathy and aid, somewhere among the mountains.

A perfect yell in answer to the request of Landlord Larry told him that Bernard Brandon would be found if he was in or near Last Chance, and so it was agreed that all would start at dawn the following morning, many mounted, many on foot, and report the result, if good or bad, at the hotel at night.

So the miners' meeting broke up, and with the first gray in the East the following morning, four-fifths of Last Chance were off, searching for the missing man.

As they wore themselves out, or completed the search over the circuit assigned them, the men came in and reported at the hotel.

Toward sunset the men began to come in rapidly, and each had the same story to tell, that the search had been a fruitless one.

Many of the mounted men did not come in until after dark, but theirs was the same story, that no trace of the missing stranger could be found.

At last every man who had been on the search had returned, and not the slightest trace of the missing Brandon had been discovered by a single one who had gone out to look for him.

No one remembered to have seen him very lately, and so his fate was unsolved, and the miners put it down as unknown, with the belief that he had either been kidnaped by road-agents or had fallen into some stream, or from a cliff, and thus met his death.

The belief of Landlord Larry and Harding was that Bernard Brandon had been captured, for some reason, by road-agents, and this convinced them that there were spies of the outlaws then dwelling in their midst; but what the motive for kidnaping the man was they could only conjecture, believing it to be ransom that they thought the miners would pay, and, if they did not, that Celeste Seldon would.

This belief of spies in their midst caused a very unpleasant and uneasy feeling among all, for hardly any man knew whether he could trust his own comrade or not.

Doctor Dick came in late from his search and rounds to visit his patients, and listened in silence to the report that Bernard Brandon could not be found.

He, however, would not believe that road-agents had kidnaped the crazed man, but said that he might have sprung from the cliff and taken his own life, have fallen over a precipice, or been devoured by the fierce mountain wolves that hung in packs about the camps.

CHAPTER V.

THE OUTLAWS' CAPTIVE.

It was with a sinking heart that Celeste Seldon saw Harding drive away upon the stage, leaving her in the power of the road-agents.

But she was a brave girl, and determined to show the outlaws that she did not fear them, no matter how great her dread of them was in reality.

The saddle and bridle she had brought with her were carried along for a couple of miles, and placed upon a led horse, one of half a score hidden there, and the masked chief started to aid her to mount:

But she said, with a sneer:

"I need no assistance from you."

With this, she placed her hands upon the horn and leaped lightly into the saddle.

Her leather trunk was then strapped securely upon a pack-saddle, and the chief said:

"Now, Miss Seldon, that you and my men are mounted, we will start."

She turned her horse on the trail behind him, and the other outlaws followed, all riding in Indian file and with several pack-horses bringing up the rear.

After a ride of a dozen miles, a halt was made for a rest, the chief said, and then Celeste Seldon observed that the hoofs of every horse were muffled, to prevent their leaving a trail.

Having been left something over a couple of miles from the scene of the holding-up of the stage, it would be next to impossible for the best of trailers to discover which way the road-agents had come to the spot and left it, for the chief's muffled-hoofed horse would leave no track to where the other animals were.

Tired out and anxious, Celeste Seldon, after eating sparingly of the food given her by the chief, sat down with her back to a tree, and, closing her eyes, dropped into a deep sleep.

When she was awakened to continue the journey, she found that she had slept an hour.

"We are ready to go, miss," said the man who had appeared to be the chief's lieutenant, and whom he had

called Wolf, whether because it was his real name, or on account of his wolfish nature, Celeste did not know.

"I am ready," she said, simply, refreshed by her short nap.

"Shall I aid you to mount, miss?"

"No, I can mount without your aid, but where is your chief?"

"He has gone on ahead, miss, to prepare for your coming, leaving me to escort you."

"I am content, for one is as bad as the other," was the reply, and, leaping into her saddle again, she fell in behind the man Wolf, and the march was again begun.

Night came on, but the outlaws rode on for an hour or more, when they halted at a small spring in a thicket of *pinons*.

Celeste was made more comfortable in a shelter of boughs, hastily cut and thrown up, and when supper was ready she ate heartily of antelope steak, crackers and coffee.

She was rather glad to have got rid of the masked chief, of whom she stood in the greatest awe, and Wolf never spoke to her unless she addressed some remark to him.

When she lay down upon the blanket-bed, spread upon fine straw, which he had made for her, she sank at once to sleep.

She had no thought of escape enter her mind, for what could she do there alone in that wild, trackless land?

She would bide her time and await the result, be it what it might.

She was awakened early in the morning, and the march was at once begun again, a halt being made a couple of hours after for breakfast.

While it was being prepared she was allowed to wander at will, Wolf calling her only when it was ready, and thus showing that they had not the slightest idea that she would do so foolish a thing as to escape from them, to perish in the wilderness or meet death by being attacked by wild beasts.

When the start was again made, Wolf said:

"When we halt for our noon camp, miss, I will have to blindfold you, and bind your hands."

"Ah! you consider me very dangerous, then?" she said, with a smile.

"You doubtless are dangerous, miss, in more ways than one; but it is to prevent you seeing where we take you, that you are to be blindfolded."

"Do you think I could guide a party after you?"

"You have the nerve to do it, miss."

"But why bind my hands?"

"To prevent your removing the bandage from your eyes, miss."

"I will pledge you my word that I will not do so."

"I believe you would keep your word, miss; but the chief is a man who is merciless, and his orders were to blindfold and bind you, and if I disobey he would shoot me down as though I were in reality a wolf."

"Perhaps not much loss, but I will submit," said Celeste, with a sigh, for she had enjoyed the scenery, and her freedom as well thus far, and now must be both blindfolded and bound.

CHAPTER VI.

ANDREW SELDON.

Although unknown to every one, Andrew Seldon, the father of Celeste Seldon, was still living in the fastnesses of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

The landslide which had fallen upon his cabin had not touched him, as he and a companion miner, Lucas Langley, who was a partner in his mine, had escaped to another part of the great gorge.

Once, when Buffalo Bill had tracked a band of outlaws into the canyon, Andrew Seldon had aided him, killing two of the outlaws, although he himself had been hidden from both parties in the fight. Buffalo Bill had never discovered who his mysterious friend was, and Andrew Seldon had made up his mind to leave the canyon for the East, taking with him the gold he had mined.

The day before the one he intended to start on he had gone on a long hunting expedition.

It was upon this hunting expedition that Andrew Seldon found himself belated from having pursued his game much further than he had thought.

It was some miles back to camp and the sun had long since ceased to send its rays down into the depths of the mighty chasm of the Grand Canyon.

He started back, with his game swung upon his back, and the shadows rapidly deepening about him.

As he neared his old destroyed home he stopped suddenly, for across the canyon a light flashed before his gaze.

"It is a firelight, as sure as I live," he muttered.

"What does it—what can it mean?"

He stood like one dazed by the sight for some time, and then slowly fell from his lips the words:

"It can mean but one thing—that some one has come into the canyon."

After a moment more of silent thought, he said, almost cheerily:

"Ah! it is Lucas."

But again his voice changed, as he added:

"No; he dreads the spot where he was so nearly buried alive, and will not go there.

"Whoever it is, he is a stranger.

"I must know, for if they have come here to remain, if they are our foes, we will be forewarned and hence forearmed.

"I will at once solve the mystery, for I had hoped never to behold a human face here other than Lucas Langley's and my own," and the gold-hunter walked away in the direction of the firelight which had so startled him.

Andrew Seldon went cautiously on his way toward the strange light which had attracted his attention.

He knew well the danger if he was discovered, and the builders of the campfire proved to be foes.

He knew the locality well, and that he could approach within a hundred yards of the fire, and discover just what there was to be seen.

Arriving within an eighth of a mile of the spot, he halted, laid aside his game and rifle, and then moved from rock to rock, tree to tree, armed only with his revolvers.

He now saw that there were three fires, two near together and one a couple of hundred feet apart and off to itself.

The scene of the camp was a small canyon near his old home, and on the trail leading to it.

There was gold in the canyon, for he had discovered it there, and taken some away, while he had marked it as his claim, it having been already staked as one of the finds and claims of the real Andrew Seldon.

In truth, there were a dozen such claims in the Grand Canyon found by Andrew Seldon, all of them paying finds.

Having reached a point within a hundred yards of the campfires, Andrew Seldon leaned over a rock and began to survey the scene.

The three fires were burning brightly, and beyond the light fell upon a number of horses corralled in the canyon, where there was grass and water.

There were brush shelters near, three in number, and about the fires in front of them were gathered a number of men.

Counting them, Andrew Seldon found that there were eight in sight.

There appeared to be no guard kept, and the camp was certainly not a very new one, apparently having been made there several weeks before.

Emboldened by his discovery, the gold-hunter crept nearer and nearer, and then could see that the men were all masked.

This struck him as being a very remarkable circumstance, indeed.

They were clad like miners, some of them wearing beads that came below their masks, and all were armed thoroughly.

They were eating their supper as Andrew Seldon looked at them.

Gaining a point of observation still nearer, the gold-hunter obtained a view of the campfire apart from the others.

A comfortable little cabin was just behind the fire, and a rustic bench had been made near it.

A blanket hung over the door of the tiny cabin, and about the fire was the evidence of a supper recently eaten, for a cup, tin plate and knives, with the remains of a meal, were upon a rock that served as a table.

Upon the rustic seat sat one whose presence there was a great surprise to Andrew Seldon.

"By Heaven! it is a woman!" he almost cried aloud, in his amazement.

Then he determined to get a still nearer view, and, after surveying the position, he decided that he could do so by passing around to the edge of the cliff and creeping along it to a point not sixty feet away.

As he, after very cautious work, reached the point he sought, some forty feet from the one at the campfire, gazing upon her, he muttered to himself:

"It is a young and beautiful girl, and why is she here with those strange men?

"Who is she, and what is this mystery?

"I must solve it."

He noted that the single fire was just around a bend of the canyon, and that the men were camped below her.

"This looks as though she was a prisoner.

"But how did they find this spot, and how dare they venture down that dangerous trail?

"Well, I did it, Lucas Langley also, and Buffalo Bill

and the comrade with him were two more to make the venture, so why not these men?

"But why are they masked, and what does it mean that they have that young girl in their midst?"

"Beyond doubt, she is a captive, and yet I dare not communicate with her.

"It would betray my presence, and I would lose all, perhaps my life.

"They do not know of my presence here in the Grand Canyon, and they will hardly find our camp, at least as long as they find gold where they are.

"Well, I will return to my home and tell Langley of my strange discovery."

After so musing, and gazing the while at the young girl, Andrew Seldon was about to leave his position, when he saw a horseman ride into the lower camp.

His horse seemed to have been hard ridden, for he came in with lowered head, and that the newcomer was in authority there was shown by the men rising as he approached the fire, while one of them took care of his horse.

"I will see what this arrival means," muttered Andrew Seldon, and he kept his position among the rocks.

The man who had ridden into camp gave some order, which Andrew Seldon could not hear, and one of those about the campfire at once set about preparing supper for him.

There was upon his face a red mask, much as the others wore, but he was dressed in somewhat better style than they, wearing cavalry boots instead of heavy ones, such as his men had on, while his body dress was a velvet jacket.

His hat was a slouch, encircled by a silver cord representing a snake, as the gold-hunter discovered when he afterward got a closer view of him.

He talked to his men for a few minutes, but what he said the gold-hunter was unable to hear.

Then he walked away, coming in the direction of the other fire.

"Now, I can know what this means," muttered Andrew Seldon, eagerly.

The young girl had certainly seen the man arrive in camp, but she had shown no interest apparently in his coming, and now, as he approached, she calmly remained seated, her eyes, however, following his movements.

As he drew near, he politely raised his sombrero, and said:

"I hope I find Miss Seldon well?"

"Seldon! She bears my name," muttered the gold-hunter, in intense surprise.

"Miss Seldon is as well as could be expected under the existing circumstances, of being the captive of a band of cutthroats," was the cutting reply, and Andrew Seldon, who heard all, opened wide his eyes.

"You are harsh in your terms, Miss Seldon."

"Are you not road-agents, robbers and murderers, and are you not holding me here for ransom, after having robbed me of a large sum in my keeping?"

"Yes, such is the case."

"Then why wince under the name of cutthroat? But you have been away for some days?"

"I have."

"You have seen your chief?"

"I have."

"And what message does he send?"

"You are to go with me at dawn to the rendezvous on the Overland Trail, where you are to be given over to the one sent by the miners of Last Chance to pay your ransom."

"I am glad of this, but will your chief keep faith, or will he play the traitor for a third time, and escape giving me up through some trick?"

"No; for if he did he would surely be run down, as he knows, by the miners, even if your life was the forfeit."

"I hope it may prove true that I am to be ransomed, and I will be ready to go with you; but where is your chief?"

"He is in the other camp."

"Then, he has two?"

"Yes."

"Am I to be blindfolded and bound again when you are taking me from here?"

"Such are his orders, Miss Seldon."

"He fears that I, a young girl, may lead a force upon his secret retreat?"

"That is just what he fears, Miss Seldon."

"I only wish I was able to do so."

"Miss Seldon, may I speak a word to you?" suddenly said the masked outlaw, drawing near.

"I believe there is no more to say, for I will be ready at the hour you desire to start."

"There is more to say, and say it I will.

"I wish to tell you that I have been a very wicked man, that I went to the bad when hardly out of my teens. I broke my mother's heart by my evil life, and ruined my father financially, driving him to suicide in his despair. I came West and tried to redeem the past by becoming an honest miner; but luck went against me, and I at last turned once more to evil and found a band of outlaws. Money came to me in plenty, and at last I drifted into the band that our chief commands, and, as you know, I am his lieutenant. He found this mine, and sent us here to work it, and have our retreat here also. Much gold is coming to us through our work, and also by our holding up the coaches on the Last Chance trail, for he posts us where to be on hand for an attack, as we have what we call the post office halfway between our camp and his. When he made you a prisoner I felt for you, and as I was the one to hold you captive and bring you here, I grew more and more fond of you, until now I must, I will tell you, that I love you with my whole heart and soul, Celeste Seldon."

The young girl had not moved during the time that the outlaw lieutenant was speaking, but now when he proclaimed his love for her, she arose, drew herself up and said, haughtily:

"And I, Celeste Seldon, abhor such love as you, an outlaw, would feel for me, and command you not again to speak one word to me while I am in the hateful atmosphere of your presence as your prisoner."

"Celeste Seldon! It was her name—my daughter's name—and yet the letter said that she was dead!

"Is this a coincidence, or is she alive?"

So mused Andrew Seldon, as he crouched among the rocks, his eyes riveted upon the girl not fifty feet from him, and who so boldly faced the outlaw officer who had dared breathe to her a word of love. He had not seen her

face since she was an infant, and yet he imagined he could recognize the face of his daughter.

The outlaw stood abashed at the manner in which his avowal of love had been received.

There was no anger in his look, and he seemed hurt rather than offended.

After Celeste Seldon's indignant response to him, he half turned away, as though to retire in silence, but then reconsidered his determination, and said, in a low tone, full of feeling:

"Pardon me, for I did wrong to think for a moment that an angel would look kindly upon a devil.

"I loved you, and I could not but tell you of it, for you had decided me as to my own course; you had made me see my evil life as it is in all its enormity, and decide to make another struggle to go back to honor and truth."

"This at least you deserve credit for, and I trust you may carry out your resolve, for in that you shall have my full sympathy."

"Thank you, Miss Seldon; but I have something more to say to you."

"Well, sir?"

"You are to be given up by the chief on the payment of your ransom?"

"Yes."

"I wish I could prevent this robbery, but I cannot, as it is simply beyond my power to do so."

"I do not ask it of you."

"Granted; but your being returned will not end it all."

"How do you mean?"

"You came here for an avowed purpose, as I understand it?"

"I did, Mr. Wolf."

"That purpose was to find one who had come West on a special mission?"

"Granted again."

"His mission was to find your father, Andrew Seldon."

The listener, crouching among the rocks, started at this, and set his teeth hard, while he awaited the reply of the young girl.

"Yes; he came to find my father, Andrew Seldon, who, I had reason to believe, was in the mining country about here."

"You have not heard of the young man who came at your bidding?"

"Let me say that he came of his own accord, knowing that a great wrong had been done my father, by one whom he believed his dearest friend.

"He came to find him and tell him all the sad truth; but why am I telling you all this?"

"Because you know that I am interested, that I can aid you."

"Can you?" was the eager reply.

"I can."

"Do so, and——"

"And what?"

"I will reward you—generously."

"I seek no reward, ask for none, would not accept any pay at your hands, other than to earn your good opinion and gratitude."

"Well, sir?" said Celeste Seldon, coolly.

"Have you found your father?"

"No; I regret to say I have not; but I was interrupted in my search by being captured by your robber chief."

"Do you know what became of the young man who came West in search of him?"

"I had a letter mailed at W—— from him, stating that he had heard of people at Last Chance who might tell him of my father, and that he was going there, and would at once communicate with me.

"I had no other letter, and my communications remained unanswered, even my telegrams wired to Santa Fé and mailed there brought no response.

"Then I decided to come out here myself, and I acted promptly."

"And you have not found the one you seek?"

"I have discovered that the coach in which he left W—— was held up by your band, that he was wounded, and that though he was placed under the care of one known as Dr. Dick, and really a fine surgeon, though his life was saved, his reason was gone, and now he is wandering about the mines of Last Chance, a harmless lunatic."

"He was, until lately."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he was kidnaped several days ago."

"Kidnaped?"

"Yes, Miss Seldon."

"For what purpose?"

"Ransom."

"By whom?"

"My chief."

"Ah! but what ransom can he get from him?"

"I believe you told the chief that you were rich, and this poor fellow is your messenger."

"I think I understand."

"Yes, you will be returned, and then negotiations will be entered into for your messenger's ransom."

"Ah! I am to be still further robbed?" said Celeste, with a sneer.

"Yes, and that is not the end," came the significant reply.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THIRD DEMAND.

There was something in the response of the outlaw officer that impressed the young girl most strangely.

What more could there be in store for her, than she had already passed through, which caused him to say that the end was not yet?

The listener among the rocks kept his eyes riveted upon the two, his ears turned to catch every word they uttered.

He now knew that the letter he had received, telling him, as Andrew Seldon, that Celeste, the daughter, was dead, was false, and a fraud perpetrated for some reason upon him.

"You say that the ransom of Bernard Brandon will not be the end?" asked Celeste, after a moment of meditation.

"It will not."

"What else can there be?"

"A great deal."

"What do you mean?"

"There will be a third demand."

"How?"

"Upon you."

"For what?"

"Gold."

"By whom?"

"The chief."

"What will the demand be for?"

"I'll tell you the truth, as I happen to know it, or rather, suspect it, from what I do know, have seen and heard."

"I hope that you will act squarely with me, Mr. Wolf."

"Upon my life, I will, and, though I cannot help you now, must even appear to be your foe, in the end I will help you and prove to be your friend."

"I hope so."

"You ask what this third demand will be?"

"Yes."

"Will you ransom Bernard Brandon?"

"Where is he?"

"A fugitive."

"Where?"

"He will be in this camp to-morrow."

"Ah! then I will see him?"

"No; he will not arrive until after your departure."

"I will await his coming."

"That cannot be, for I have orders to start with you to be ransomed, and you are not supposed to know that he has been captured."

"But you have told me so."

"It was a confidential communication, and if you betray me I can render you no further service, for my usefulness will be gone; in fact, I would be put to death."

"I will not betray you."

"Thank you; but let me say that Brandon will be brought here, for two men now have him in charge, and are on the trail here."

"Yes."

"You will be ransomed, and then go to Last Chance. There you will learn of Brandon's mysterious disappearance, and a ransom will soon after be demanded of him."

"Yes."

"You will pay it?"

"Of course, I will."

"What is it?"

"Then comes the third trial."

"You will be captured!"

"Ah!"

"It is true."

"By whom?"

"The masked chief of the Cloven Hoofs of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado."

"He will still hunt me down?"

"He will."

"Being forewarned is being forearmed."

"Not in this case."

"Why so?"

"He works in a most mysterious way, and do all you may, you will be captured by him."

"And another ransom demanded?"

"Yes."

"And so he will continue to rob me of my gold."

"In this case the ransom will not be of gold."

"I do not understand."

"The ransom demanded will be your hand in marriage!"

Celeste uttered a cry of alarm, and started back with a look of horror upon her beautiful face.

She stood for a moment in silence, and then asked:

"Do you mean that he will make this demand upon me?"

"I mean that the demand will be made upon you by one who will enforce it."

"Who?"

"That I cannot tell you, more I cannot say to you, yet I will relieve your anxiety by saying that I will protect you, cost whose life it may."

"You?"

"Yes, if you are again captured; though, if I can prevent it, I will."

"But if I am?"

"It will end there, for then I will prove my reformation; I will protect you, and that poor fellow for whom you will have to pay ransom."

"When I do, I believe I will be able to return your gold, paid in ransom, to you again."

"But, whether I do or not, you will go your way free, and Brandon also, and I will prove that you have reformed me, that my loving you has made me a different man."

Now, I cannot, will not say more; but remember that through all I will secretly be your friend, though openly appearing as your guard and enemy."

"I thank you, and I will trust you," and, stepping forward, Celeste Seldon held forth her hand.

The man put forth his own as though to grasp it, then hesitated, and said:

"No; I will prove my reformation, my friendship before I touch you with my crime-stained hand."

"I will call you at an early hour," and, turning abruptly, the outlaw lover of Celeste Seldon walked away.

Resuming her seat, the young girl became lost in thought, while Andrew Seldon, after gazing at her for a few moments in silence, turned away from his hiding-place and crept cautiously back to where he had left his game and rifle.

He knew that his comrade would be most anxious about him, yet he determined to remain there for the night, and see the departure in the morning.

He would then know just how many outlaws went with Celeste Seldon as a guard, and how many remained.

So he made himself as comfortable as possible and sank to sleep.

He awoke an hour before dawn, and saw the campfires burning brightly.

Creeping to the safest point of observation, from which he could retreat unseen after daylight, should any of the outlaws remain in their camp, he waited for developments.

He had not long to wait before he saw a party approaching on horseback.

There was one in the lead, and, as he came within a few yards of where he lay, Andrew Seldon recognized the outlaw officer, Wolf.

He held a lariat in his hand that was attached to the bit of the horse following, and upon which was mounted Celeste Seldon.

In the dim gray of early dawn Seldon saw that the eyes of Celeste were blindfolded, and her hands rested in her lap as though bound.

Behind her came in single file five outlaws, and like their leader, they were masked.

Bringing up the rear were a couple of pack-horses well laden.

The party passed on and then Andrew Seldon turned his attention to the outlaw camp, in which several of the men had been left.

Having discovered this, Seldon then crept cautiously back, picked up his rifle and game and started off at a double-quick for his own camp, anxious to relieve his pard's anxiety regarding him, and to tell him all that he had discovered.

A man of great endurance, he made a rapid run to his home, and did not feel it in the least.

He found Lucas Langley just starting off on a search for him, and the welcome he received was a sincere one.

"How glad I am to see you, Pard Seldon.

"Surely, you were not lost?" he said.

"No, indeed; but have you any breakfast, for I am as ravenous as a wolf, as I went without dinner and supper yesterday, and did not delay to cook anything this morning."

"You shall have something in a few minutes, so wash up and I'll get it for you."

"And then we must have a talk," said Seldon, as he went down toward the little stream for a refreshing plunge bath.

"He has had an adventure of some kind, I am sure," muttered Lucas Langley, as he threw a fine steak upon the coals and put some fresh coffee in the pot.

Andrew Seldon's bath greatly refreshed him, and he ate his breakfast quietly, after which he said:

"We'll not go gold-hunting to-day, pard, for I have something to tell you."

"I feel that you have seen some one in the Grand Canyon."

"You are right; I have."

"Are they here to stay?"

"Yes; they think so."

"Who are they?"

"They are masked men, outlaws, belonging, I feel sure, to the road-agent band I heard of when at W——."

"They go masked in camp?"

"They do."

"How many?"

"There are, I think, nearly a dozen of them."

"Tell me of them, and where they are."

"They are camped in the blue cliff canyon near our old home, and are working the mine we marked as Number Two on our map."

"They are here for gold, then?"

"Yes; gold-diggers in their idle moments, and at other times road-agents, making their retreat here where they deem themselves safe."

"They did not see you?"

"No, indeed; but I got within fifty feet of one of their campfires, and where they held a captive."

"Ah! a prisoner?"

"Yes."

"Did you know him?"

"It was a young girl."

"The devils!"

"That is what they are, indeed; but let me tell you just what I discovered, overheard and saw."

Then Andrew Seldon told the story as the reader is acquainted with it, and in Lucas Langley he found a most ready listener.

"Oh, that we could rescue that young girl!" said Lucas Langley, when he had heard all.

"To make the attempt would be but to meet with signal failure now, Lucas."

"I fear so."

"Still, I will see that they are not left long to carry on their work of devilry."

"I am with you, heart and soul."

"I know that well, pard."

"But they will return the girl for the ransom demanded, and then they will get the amount they claim for the young man they spoke of."

"Yes."

"This will take some days, and in that time I shall act."

"You?"

"Yes, they will lay their plans to kidnap the girl from Last Chance, to carry out this scheme of the chief to have his third demand come in, and right there I shall thwart them."

"But how can you?"

"I will start to-night for Fort Faraway."

"Will you go there?"

"Yes."

"You told me that there were reasons why you would not go anywhere among those who might recognize you."

"It is different now, and necessity demands that I take the risk."

"I have changed greatly, for my long hair and beard, my glasses and other changes completely disguise me from what I was, and so I will go to Fort Faraway."

"For what purpose?"

"I wish to see Buffalo Bill and place these facts before him, for we can tell him where to find the outlaws' secret retreat, and I believe that my daughter and the young man can be saved, and every member of the robber gang captured."

"It would be a grand thing for you to do."

"Yes; it is just what I wish to do, to render some valuable service to the government."

"When shall we start?"

"I will start to-night, but you, pard, must remain here in possession of our mines."

"As you wish, pard; but will you be gone long?"

"Not a day longer than is necessary, pard."

"Well, success go with you," was Lucas Langley's response, and the two men began to make preparations for the start of the one with information of where the retreat of the outlaw band could be found.

Andrew Seldon did not care to take a pack-horse, for he wished to make all the time possible, and when the sun went down he was ready for the trail, and, with Lucas Langley accompanying him he started down the canyon to steal by the robbers' camp.

Well supplied with food and ammunition, having plenty of blankets along, for the nights were cold, and mounted upon the best one of their horses, Andrew Seldon felt ready to cope with whatever he might have to encounter in the way of hardships and dangers.

Muffers had been prepared for the hoofs of his horse, that he might leave no trail, and make no sound in passing the robber camp, while a muzzle was carried for the

nose of the animal to prevent his neighing and thus betraying his presence to foes.

After crossing the narrow ridge, the mufflers and muzzle were tied on and the two men stole along, leading the horse, until they came in sight of the campfires.

But two were burning now, and about them only a few men were visible.

The two men slipped by unseen with their horse, some eighth of a mile distant from the camp, and having seen his pard in safety, Lucas Langley bade him farewell, with many good wishes for his success, and started upon his return.

Mounting then, Andrew Seldon set off on his lonely and perilous mission.

He ascended the hazardous trail, stripped his horse of his trappings upon reaching the deadly cliff which he had to pass around, and got safely by with the animal. Then he brought his saddle and trappings around, led the horse to the top of the canyon rim, and, mounting, set off for Fort Faraway.

By rapid riding, he reached the deserted camp soon after midnight, and, dismounting, prepared to go into camp.

There was the best of water and grass there, and to be merciful to his horse, Andrew Seldon did not allow his own feelings to cause him to camp elsewhere, when the animal would be the sufferer.

Having watered his horse and staked him out to feed, he sat down on a log near the wicky-up and ate his cold supper quietly.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO WELCOME THE FAIR GUEST.

The miners of Last Chance were too much excited over the expected ransom of Celeste Seldon, and the thought of soon having a young and beautiful girl in the mining camps to devote themselves to steady work, after the situation was known to them.

Then, too, they were greatly disturbed at the mysterious disappearance of Bernard Brandon, the young man whose mind had been destroyed by his wound, and which they could not comprehend, for not the slightest trace had been found of him with all their searching.

The fact that they had been robbed, and also Celeste Seldon, was another disturbing element, and so it was that little work was done in the mines during the time following Harding's arrival and making known the story, and the day set for Dr. Dick to go out with the ransom money for the young girl whom they all so longed to welcome in their frontier home.

Landlord Larry had set the example of having things spruced up for her coming, and the miners had quickly followed his example, having put their cabins in better condition.

A cabin which the landlord was having built for his own especial use, apart from the hotel, was hastened to completion, and then the very best the hotel could supply was put in it as furniture, and to make it attractive to the fair visitor, who was to be regarded as the guest of Last Chance.

At last the eventful day arrived for the ransom to be paid, and the miners had all taken a peep into the quarters of Celeste Seldon to see how attractive it was.

Dr. Dick had furnished a number of things to make the cabin attractive, and the miners that had any pretty robes, or souvenirs, did likewise until it would have been a callous heart indeed that would not be touched by their devotion to one whom they had never seen.

The question of an attempt to capture the road-agents had been fully discussed, but dismissed upon the advice of Landlord Larry, Dr. Dick and Harding, who represented the danger that the young girl would be in at the hands of the merciless masked chief.

That Dr. Dick was the right man to send out with the ransom all felt assured, for if there was any trickery on the part of the road-agents, he was the one to meet it.

Dr. Dick had even offered to go out upon horseback alone, but it was thought best that the coach should be sent for the visitor and Harding should drive, he having met her.

The miners, however, arranged to meet her with a delegation at the entrance to the valley, and escort her to the hotel, when all not of the escort should receive her with shouts of welcome.

Every man was to be dressed in his best, and in honor of the occasion the saloons were to be all closed, so that no one would get off his base, and shock her.

When at last the day arrived, Harding mounted his box and gathered up his reins, Dr. Dick following to a seat by his side a moment after.

The bag containing the gold to be paid in ransom was placed between their feet, Landlord Larry gave the word to go, and the coach rolled away at a rapid pace, followed by the wildest cheering.

The doctor was fixed up in his most magnificent attire, his jewels shone with more than accustomed luster and there was an expression upon his face that boded no good for the road-agents if they meant treachery in their dealings.

Harding was also rigged out in his finest, and wore a pleased look at the prospect of meeting Celeste again, upon whom he considered that he held a special claim, and yet underlying all was an anxiety that some hitch might occur in gaining her release that would destroy all prospect of seeing her.

The coach had been cleaned up to look its best, and a United States flag floated from a staff fastened upon the rear.

The harnesses had been burnished up to look their best, and red, white, and blue streamers had been attached to the bridles, so that the whole outfit presented a very gorgeous appearance, and one intended to impress the beholder with the grandeur of the occasion.

And so it was that Dr. Dick went out with the ransom for Celeste Seldon, with Harding proud at holding the reins over the picked team that would take her back to Last Chance.

"Well, Dr. Dick, what do you think of our chances?" asked Harding, when the coach had turned out of the valley and was fairly started upon the trail to the meeting with the masked road-agent chief.

"How do you mean our chances, Harding?"

"To get the young lady?"

"You were the one to make the terms."

"True, and I fear treachery."

"What chance is there for it?"

"We have the money."

"Yes."
 "We are but two."
 "Very true."
 "They have the captive."
 "Yes."

"And they can bring many against us."

"Also very true, Harding."

"Now, if the chief means treachery, and has his men there, he can hold us up, get the ransom money, still keep possession of the girl, and there it is."

"He might do so; but I hardly believe we need submit to even half-a-dozen outlaws, where so much is at stake."

"I'm with you, Doc, in whatever you say or do."

"I know that, Pard Harding; but there is another way to look at this affair."

"How is that?"

"If those road-agents were treacherous, as you seem to fear, it would end in their utter annihilation."

"How so, Doc?"

"Why, the miners would send the alarm to W—— and to Fort Faraway, and we would have that splendid fellow, Buffalo Bill, leading a column of soldiers on the hunt for them from one point, another force would push out from W——, and a couple of hundred miners from Last Chance, and every outlaw in this part of the country would be caught and hanged."

"I believe you are right, Doc."

"I had not thought of the result of treachery on their part, for they would get the worst of it; no, I guess all will go well."

"I think so, and hope so sincerely," answered Dr. Dick, and the coach rolled on in silence for some time, when Harding asked:

"What do you think of Brandon's disappearance, doctor?"

"I hardly know what to think, unless he has fallen from some precipice and killed himself."

"I guess that is it; but now let me give you a warning, Doc."

"Of what?"

"That young girl."

"What have I to fear, pard?"

"If you don't fall in love with her you are a different man from what I take you to be."

"You have been caught, I see."

"Yes, I'm gone, clean gone; but I guess that is all the good it will do me, for I suppose her lover is that poor fellow Brandon."

"You only think her lovely just because she is the only woman you have seen on the frontier. She is doubtless as ugly as an old maid."

"Just wait and see her, and then say which of us is wrong," said Harding, with a confident smile.

As the coach turned around a cliff neither Dr. Dick or Harding saw that there was a man standing among the pines watching them.

He had, from his position, been able to see the coach a mile away, as it wound along the valley, and he had watched it as it approached with seemingly the deepest interest.

He stood erect, like a soldier on duty, one hand resting upon a repeating rifle, the other grasping a field glass, which he had occasionally raised to his eyes and viewed the coming stage.

He stood like a sentinel, and had been there for an hour or more before the coach rolled into view.

A glance was sufficient to show that the silent sentinel on the cliff was none other than Buffalo Bill, the chief of scouts.

He was dressed as was his wont, and back from the cliff a couple of hundred yards, grazing upon the ridge, was his horse.

But, strangest of all, the scout sentinel did not hail the coach, did not make his presence known, but allowed it to roll by, himself unseen, as though he wished to keep the fact of his being there a secret, even from Dr. Dick and Harding, his ally and spy.

As the coach drew near the rendezvous, appointed by the masked road-agent chief at the Dead Line, Harding breathed hard with suppressed emotion.

He had really fallen in love with the beautiful girl, whom he felt he was in a manner the protector of, and he was most anxious as to the result.

Aside from his regard for Celeste Seldon, her unprotected condition would have won his deepest sympathy under any circumstances.

Dr. Dick, on the other hand, was calm and silent.

He had the money demanded, and he had come to do his duty, but was prepared to face all emergencies that might arise.

At last the scene of the tragedies came in view, the cross erected at the Dead Line was just before them, and then Harding grasped the reins expecting a summons to halt.

No one was visible in the pass, but that was no sign that there was no one there, as Harding and Dr. Dick well knew.

Just as the leaders reached the cross a voice called out: "Halt!"

Hard went the foot of the driver upon the brake, and his hands pulled the team to a sudden stop.

Dr. Dick instinctively dropped his hand upon his revolver, but removed it instantly and calmly awaited the issue.

The coach having halted, the same voice called out:

"Is there any one inside the coach?"

"No one," answered Harding.

"If you lie to me, Harding, your life will be the forfeit."

"All right, so be it, sir; but Dr. Dick and I are all that came."

"Who is following you?"

"No one."

"Did none of the miners come out from Last Chance?"

"Not one."

"You are sure?"

"I am."

"If we are attacked, both you and Dr. Dick shall die, and if the force is large enough to press me hard, I shall kill the girl."

"You need have no fear of an attack; but I only wish we dared make the attempt, for I would like to see every one of you hanged."

A laugh greeted this remark of the driver and once again the unseen road-agent called out:

"Did you bring the gold?"

"Did you bring the young lady?"

"Answer my question, Harding."

"You answer mine."

"I will reply when I have had an answer."

"If you brought the young lady, as you pledged yourself to do, you can get the ransom money; but if you did not, you will have to fight to get it."

"That is our trade; but the young lady is here."

"Then get her out of your vile company as quickly as possible."

"Where's the money?"

Before Harding could reply Dr. Dick said, sternly:

"A truce to this nonsensical parleying."

"I have the money and will pay it over when the young lady is given into my charge, but not before."

"Where is she?"

The road-agent seemed impressed by the stern words of Dr. Dick and responded:

"I will go and fetch her, while you turn your coach around."

This Harding at once did, and coming to a halt again, Dr. Dick got down from the box, and the bag of gold was handed to him by Harding.

There was a wait of a few minutes, and then out from among the pines in the pass came a man, followed by Celeste Seldon, a few feet behind him.

As she approached the spot she waved her hand to Harding, and said, pleasantly:

"We meet again, my good friend."

"And mighty glad am I that we do, miss."

"Permit me to introduce to you the boss man of Last Chance, Dr. Dick, and he is here with the money to pay your ransom."

Dr. Dick doffed his sombrero, bowed low, and then stepped forward as Celeste held out her hand to him, and said in his courtly way:

"I am happy in meeting Miss Seldon and receiving her in the name of the miners of Last Chance."

The outlaw who accompanied Celeste was masked completely, and his form enveloped in a black robe that effectually concealed it.

He stepped toward Dr. Dick, and said:

"You, sir, have the ransom money for the return of this young lady?"

"I have gold amounting to the sum demanded."

"See here, Doc, I don't see why we should be robbed by one man, so let us run him in, now we have the young lady, and we will not have to pay the gold," and Harding suddenly covered the outlaw with his revolver.

"No, no," cried Celeste.

"That will never do."

"No, Harding, we must keep faith with him, even if he be a murderer and a thief."

"Put up your gun," said Dr. Dick.

The masked outlaw had not moved at the action of Harding, but now said:

"You wisely decide, Dr. Dick, for I am no fool to be caught in a trap and I trust no man, so came prepared to meet treachery if it was intended, and this young lady will tell you that my men are within easy range, and you, Harding, in covering me with your revolver took big chances."

"I didn't believe you would come alone, and we were fools to do so, for we could have fought it out right here," grumbled the driver, greatly disappointed at his not carrying out his suddenly determined upon plan.

The road-agent then took the bag, opened it, ran over the gold like one who knew its value, and then said:

"Yes, there is the amount here, no more, no less."

"Ask Miss Seldon if she has not been treated with marked respect."

"I can but answer yes, for I have been; but am I not to have my trunk and side-saddle?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," and the road-agent gave a signal, which was promptly answered by two men appearing in the edge of the pines.

They wore long black robes and red masks also, and their appearance was proof that their leader had not come alone.

"Bring the baggage belonging to this lady, and her side-saddle and bridle also," called out the leader.

The men disappeared and Dr. Dick asked:

"Do you expect to keep up your lawless acts much longer without meeting the fate you deserve, Sir Outlaw?"

"Yes, for the money I get is worth taking big chances for, Dr. Dick, and gambler that you are, you never do a better day's work than what sum this gold calls for."

"It is a long lane that has no turn, and the turn will come for you some day," said Harding.

A light laugh beneath the mask was the answer, and Celeste Seldon's face wore a clouded expression Harding was not slow to observe.

"Then I am free to go, sir?" and Celeste turned to the outlaw.

"You are, Miss Seldon," was the answer.

She turned to the coach and Dr. Dick aided her into it, just as the two outlaws came up with the small leather trunk she had brought with her and her saddle and bridle.

Taking the back seat Celeste leaned up in one corner, as though fatigued, and her baggage having been put on top, Dick and Harding mounted to the box, the outlaws attentively regarding them through the eyeholes in their masks.

"Remember, pards, I still drive this trail," said the driver, with an air of defiance as he gathered up the reins.

"I won't forget, Harding; but I advise you to keep in mind the story of the pitcher that went once too often to the well, for right here some day you may meet your fate."

"If I do you will not find me flinch from it," was the plucky response, and the driver called to his horses and the team moved on.

Looking back at the bend, the driver and Dr. Dick saw that the outlaws had already disappeared, while Celeste Seldon, gazing back, also noted the same fact and murmured to herself:

"What yet is before me, I wonder?"

CHAPTER IX.

DR. DICK TELLS THE NEWS.

When the coach had got away from the Dead Line, Harding gave a deep sigh of relief, for the first time feeling that Celeste was safe, and would not be retaken by the outlaws.

"Well, Doc, she's safe now, and we didn't lose our scalps," he said.

"It is a cause of congratulation all round, Harding."

"Now, Dr. Dick, you have got to tell the young lady about the poor crazy fellow."

"Did you not tell her?"

"That his wound had crazed him, yes; but that is not the worst of it."

"Ah, yes, you mean that he has been captured?"

"I cannot say that, Doc; but he has mysteriously disappeared."

"Well, you wish me to break the news to her?"

"I do, for I can't tell her what I know will hurt her, and it won't do for her to hear it from the men when she arrives in Last Chance."

"I guess you are right, pard, so draw up and I'll take a seat inside the coach and tell her the news."

"Be very gentle, Doc, for I have an idea she loves that young man."

"I'll break it to her as gently as I can," was the response, and as Harding drew rein a moment after, Dr. Dick sprang down from the box and said:

"May I ride with you, Miss Seldon?"

"Certainly, sir, if you desire."

"I have something to talk to you about," said Dr. Dick, as he entered the coach and took the front seat.

"I shall be glad to hear what you have to say, sir, and I desire now to thank you for your very great kindness toward me, while you risked your life in coming out here to serve me."

"Do not speak of it, Miss Seldon, for the miners all chipped in and made up a purse for your ransom, while they are now anxiously awaiting your coming to give you a right royal welcome, for you will be the first lady who ever came to our camp."

"Indeed! this will be an honor; but do you mean that there are none of my sex there?"

"Not one, only rough men, but with noble hearts many of them, so that you will be made to feel at once at home."

"How odd it will be, yet I have no hesitancy in going there, I assure you," and Celeste gazed into the face of the man before her with both interest and admiration.

"Miss Seldon, what I most wished to say to you I fear will deeply pain you," said Dr. Dick, after a pause.

"Let me hear it, sir, for I am becoming accustomed to being pained of late," and Celeste was perfectly calm.

"I was told by Harding, the driver, that you were on your way to Last Chance, to look up a friend who had come here on a mission for you, and who you had feared was in trouble?"

"Yes, and my fears were realized when I learned that the coach in which he was a passenger had been held up, I believe that is what you call it, by road-agents, and Mr. Brandon was so severely wounded in the head that his brain was turned."

"Yes, but that is not all, Miss Seldon."

"Ah! what else is there to tell?"

"He was under my care for a long while, and I did all that I could to restore his reason, except to perform an operation for his relief, which I feared to risk."

"So Mr. Harding told me."

"When his bodily health was restored he left my cabin and roamed about the camps up to a week ago, when he most mysteriously disappeared."

"We had all the miners out upon a search for him, did all in our power to find him, but in vain, and what his fate has been is only conjecture."

"And what is that conjecture, Dr. Dick, for I believe you are so called?"

"Yes, I am known to all solely as Dr. Dick; but let me answer your question by replying that we believe the poor fellow has lost his life by falling over a cliff."

"Such is not the case, sir," was the reply that startled the doctor.

"Mr. Brandon is now a captive of the road-agents."

Dr. Dick gazed at Celeste Seldon in amazement.

"Do you know this, Miss Seldon, or is it only conjecture on your part?" he asked, when he had recovered from his surprise.

He had come prepared to console, but instead had found the young girl cool and with apparently knowledge which he did not possess, regarding the man whom Harding had said he believed was her lover.

"I know it, Dr. Dick."

"May I ask how?"

"I have just been a captive of the outlaws myself, and in coming here from their secret retreat, we met two of the road-agents with a prisoner."

"The leader had some talk with them, but though I at once recognized Mr. Brandon I was not allowed to speak with him."

"Did you request it?"

"Naturally."

"But were refused?"

"Yes."

"Was any reason given?"

"Simply that I would not be allowed to, and if I did Mr. Brandon would not know me as he was crazy, while they did not care to have me do so."

"Where was this, Miss Seldon?"

"A short distance after we left their retreat."

"Could you lead the way to their retreat?"

"No, for I was blindfolded and bound miles before reaching there."

"The outlaw chief did this?"

"He was not along, but it was done by his orders."

"Did you not speak to him of it?"

"I have not seen him since."

"Why, was not that the chief who gave you over to-day?"

"No, sir."

"I certainly thought so."

"It was his lieutenant, who took me to the retreat and back under his orders."

"And where is the chief?"

"At his other hiding-place, his men said."

"You were well treated, I hope, Miss Seldon?"

"With perfect respect and consideration, sir, I am happy to say, the only indignity being that I was blindfolded and had my hands bound in approaching and leaving the outlaw retreat; but I suppose that was necessary for the safety of the band."

"You certainly take it most coolly."

"Why do otherwise, sir?"

"Do you know the motive of the road-agents in making that poor crazy fellow a prisoner?"

"Money."

"How do you mean?"

"They doubtless captured his luggage and discovered by it papers that went to show that a big ransom would be paid for his release."

"Ah! they will demand a ransom for him, then?"

"Assuredly."

"The miners will hardly pay it if it is a large sum."

"I do not ask them to do so."

"You do not?"

"No."

"Who will pay it, then?"

"I will."

"You?"

"Certainly."

"Pardon me, but you are a young girl, and——"

"A rich one, nevertheless, Dr. Dick."

"I sent Mr. Brandon West on this mission, and he has met with misfortune, and I will pay the ransom demanded, take him East and place him in the care of the most eminent surgeons, that they may aid him if it is possible. You, as a skilled surgeon, for such I have heard you were, might tell me what you deem the chances are for his recovery?"

"Miss Seldon, the blow of that bullet caused an indentation of the skull, which might be operated upon and successfully raised so as to restore his reason. The chances are ninety-nine to a hundred against success, and only the most skillful surgeon and nerry one could accomplish it if done."

"Thank you; the one chance in favor shall be taken, for without reason one might as well be dead—yes, far better."

"And you will stand all this expense?"

"Certainly, for it is my intention to pay back to the miners every dollar they subscribed for my ransom, for, as I said, I have the means to do it and far more."

"You are a plucky woman, Miss Seldon; but see, we are approaching the valley now and you must prepare for a welcome," and Dr. Dick called to Harding to come to a halt.

Harding drew up promptly.

He had heard the voices of the two within the stage, yet not what was said, and he was anxious to know how Celeste took the news of the disappearance of the man whom she had come to the Wild Western frontier to see.

"Do you mean that I shall mount to the box, sir?" asked Celeste, in answer to what the doctor had said after the coach halted.

"I do, Miss Seldon, for the men will wish to see you, and within ten minutes more we will be in the valley."

"Of course I cannot refuse, sir," and Celeste sprang out of the coach and mounted to the box, taking her seat by the side of Harding, while Dr. Dick settled himself upon her trunk upon the top of the coach."

"Now, miss, we'll make 'em hum," said Harding, and he cracked his whip in a way that sent the team along at a splendid pace.

As they neared the turn into the valley Harding took a bugle, in lieu of a stage horn, and played in a skillful manner the ringing notes of "Annie Laurie," intending the sentiment to apply to Celeste, Dr. Dick from his perch the while taking the reins.

The notes of the bugle ringing out the touching air brought tears to the eyes of Celeste Seldon, who, however, was startled a moment after as the stage came in sight of a hundred horsemen drawn up in two lines, one on either side of the trail.

They were a wild, reckless looking lot of rough riders,

but the cheer they gave when they saw Celeste on the box came from their hearts.

Their hats were doffed, and as the yells burst from their lips they closed in behind the coach four abreast and came dashing along as an escort.

Celeste waved her handkerchief vigorously, her beautiful lips quivering, her eyes swimming with the emotion that almost overwhelmed her.

"Three cheers for the Lady of Last Chance," came in the deep voice of Dr. Dick from the top of the coach, and they were given with savage earnestness.

Along dashed the coach, Harding lashing his horses into a run and driving with marvelous skill, while behind them thundered the hundred horsemen yelling like demons in their glad welcome to the first lady to visit their wild camp.

Celeste saw the cabins along the canyon valley, perched here and there upon the hills, and at last discovered the group of buildings that marked the settlement the miners were pleased to call the "City" of Last Chance.

Gathered there was a vast crowd of men, and when the stage came in sight and three persons were seen on top, with the mounted escort hastening after, the yells of welcome began.

The roar floated down the valley, and reached the ears of Celeste Seldon, and she muttered in a low tone:

"How kind they all are."

"They mean it, miss," said Harding, and he felt just pride in his frontier home at the reception, and the manner in which Celeste received it greatly pleased him.

"This is indeed a welcome to be proud of, and never can I forget it."

On flew the horses, and up the hill they dashed to at last come to a halt before the hotel.

The din was now terrific, for the voices of the horsemen joined in with the miners about the hotel, who, with one accord drew their revolvers and began to empty them in the air.

As there were hundreds of miners and all were armed with a couple of revolvers each, the rattling of the fusillade may be imagined.

Celeste bowed right and left, waving her handkerchief, until Landlord Larry aided her to dismount and led her into the hotel, and the welcome was at an end.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNCIL.

Celeste Seldon was not one to put on airs.

She had been well reared, was refined, lovable by nature, plucky enough for a man, for she had the heart and will to do and dare anything where duty called, and yet she was as simple as a child by nature.

She was deeply touched by the reception she had received, and in glancing about, when she saw only a wild-looking set of men, rude log cabins and an air of the far frontier pervading all, she knew that it was just what she must expect to see and find, and she at once adapted herself to circumstances.

She was escorted by Landlord Larry to her cabin, Harding himself bringing her trunk and another miner her saddle and bridle.

The appearance of the cabin revealed to her at a glance how much had been done to make her comfortable, and

she praised the neat quarters and expressed the greatest satisfaction in her surroundings.

When she went over to the hotel to dinner the whole crowd of miners there rose at her entrance, and every hat was doffed and placed beneath the bench on which the men sat, for hat-racks were not one of the luxuries of the Last Chance Hotel, and a miner would as soon have thought of parting with his pistols as his head covering.

At his own table, where sat besides himself Dr. Dick and Harding, Landlord Larry placed Celeste Seldon, and she was given the best the house afforded, and expressed herself as being treated far more kindly than she had the slightest anticipation of.

The meal concluded, Celeste said that she would like to consult with the three she regarded as her immediate protectors, the landlord, Dr. Dick and Harding.

So the three met her in the landlord's private office and Celeste at once said:

"I wish first to thank all of my kind friends here through you, gentlemen, for the very generous manner in which you have received and treated me here. I know that the ransom money demanded for my release was quickly raised by the people here, you three being particularly generous; but I desire to say that I have the money to pay you back, and will do so."

"No, no, under no circumstances, Miss Seldon," said Dr. Dick, eagerly, and the others chimed in with him.

But Celeste was firm in her determination, and said:

"I have no claim upon you, and besides, I am very well off, so I shall insist, and Landlord Larry, I will give you a draft for the amount upon an Eastern bank, and for more, as there will be another demand upon me, in the amount to ransom the one who came here for me, Mr. Bernard Brandon."

"Do you believe a ransom will be demanded for him, Miss Seldon?" asked Dr. Dick.

"Certainly; for why else was he taken?"

"I cannot see what ransom the outlaws expected to get through him."

"When he was wounded they captured certain papers he had in his possession, and these proved that he had friends who were able and willing to pay for his release."

"Under such circumstances, then, the kidnaping of the poor fellow might have been made," Dr. Dick said.

"Yes, I am sure that such was the case."

"But will you pay his ransom, Miss Seldon?"

"Why not, Landlord Larry?"

"I think," said Dr. Dick, "that as you came to visit Last Chance, we, the dwellers here, should be responsible and pay these ransoms."

"So say I," put in Harding, quickly.

"And I agree with you," added the landlord.

"Under no circumstances will I hear to it, for I will pay all, my own and the ransom of Mr. Brandon, so please send the draft through for the money, Landlord Larry, and while here I will take steps to find out all I can regarding my father, who was last heard of in this part of the country."

"Miss Seldon, I can tell you what you must know sooner or later about your father, who, let me say, was also my friend," said Dr. Dick.

Celeste nerved herself to bear the worst, and asked, calmly:

"What have you to tell me, Dr. Dick?"

"Of your father?"

"You knew him?"

"Yes, for though my senior in years we were devoted friends."

"Have you seen him since coming West?"

"I have not; but let me tell you that, when on a scout with Buffalo Bill, the latter was rescued by a person who was alone, and on his way to W——."

"The scout had with him a prisoner, a deserter from the army and a murderer, who had been taken here in Last Chance, and he was taking him a prisoner to Fort Faraway, when he was attacked by a desperado by the name of Headlight Joe and his gang."

"With his horse shot and falling upon him, Buffalo Bill would have been killed and his prisoner rescued, but for the coming of the horseman referred to, and who put the outlaws to flight."

"He gave the name of Andrew Seldon, said nothing as to why he was in that part of the country or where he lived, and went on his way."

"When I came up with Buffalo Bill and heard his story of his rescue, and the name of his rescuer, it at once recalled my old-time friend, and with the scout as my companion we later sought to find him."

"We trailed him to his home, where he had dwelt with one other comrade, and they were missing together."

"And where was that, sir?"

"In the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, Miss Seldon."

"And you found him?" eagerly asked Celeste, while the landlord and Harding gazed at her with deepest sympathy at what they felt she must hear.

"We found his house, or rather the wreck of it, for, mining under a cliff a thousand feet in height, it had caved in upon them, burying them beneath a mountain of red sandstone."

Celeste shuddered and covered her face with her hands, but very quickly regained her composure and said:

"Are you sure that my father was in the mine when it caved in?"

"I am very sure, Miss Seldon, that both he and his comrade were."

"We, the scout and myself, were camped in the canyon and heard the cave-in, and it felt like a mighty earthquake, and was at night."

"We made a thorough search the next day, but could not find any trace of a human being, and their horses shared the same fate, with a dog also, which we heard barking that same night."

"Yes, there is no doubt of your father's fate."

"I thank you, Dr. Dick, for your telling me all; but, I must see Buffalo Bill, the famous scout, and ask him to guide me to the fatal spot, the scene of my father's lone life in these wilds, and of his death," said Celeste, in a low tone that revealed how deeply she felt her father's fate.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRET CAMP.

Buffalo Bill, in his hiding-place, from which he saw the coach carrying the money for Celeste Seldon's ransom pass, stood for some time in silent meditation, after the coach had disappeared, and then, shouldering his rifle,

struck off over the mountains with an evident purpose in view.

A walk of some ten miles brought him to a secluded nook in the mountains, a perfect basin, a dozen acres in size, heavily wooded, with plenty of grass and water.

A narrow pass, not twenty feet in width, was the only entrance to the basin, and this was securely fastened up with long poles.

Over this he clambered, and as he walked into the basin a couple of horses feeding there greeted him with a welcoming neigh.

In the further end, among the pines, was a brush cabin, and in it were blankets and a camping outfit, with saddle, pack-saddle and bridles.

Buffalo Bill proceeded to build a fire and cook dinner, after which he caught one of his horses, saddled him, and strapped on some blankets and a bag of provisions.

Leading the horse out of the basin, he replaced the barrier securely, so that the other animal could not get out, and mounting, started off for the fort.

As he rode along he muttered to himself:

"I can do nothing alone, I feel certain, and by this time the one man whose aid I can best depend upon is at the fort, and he will gladly return with me."

Pressing on at a steady gait, he did not halt until some time after nightfall, did not build a fire, but ate a cold supper, staked his horse out, rolled up in his blankets and was soon fast asleep.

He rose early and the coming day found him several miles on his way from his night camp.

About eight o'clock he halted, built a fire, broiled the steak of an antelope he had killed, which he ate with some crackers and bacon, his horse faring well on the grass near by.

A rest of an hour and a half and he was again in the saddle, keeping up the same steady gait until noon, when another halt was made for a couple of hours.

On through the afternoon he urged his horse once more, halting only after nightfall.

But two hours before daybreak he was in the saddle, and now his horse was pushed more rapidly forward, as though a long rest lay not very far ahead.

It was two hours before noon when the worn-out horse pricked up his ears as he saw ahead a flag fluttering in the skies a mile ahead.

In through the stockade gate of Fort Faraway rode Buffalo Bill, and he asked to be at once taken to the quarters of the commanding officer, where he was welcome.

He told Major Randall of the robberies on the coaches and said that he had men watching the roads from a secret camp.

"That means you are on the right trail to bag those road-agents?"

"Yes, sir."

"They appear to be well handled?"

"They are, sir, for their chief is a man of remarkable pluck, cunning and skill, and he handles them in a masterly manner."

"Who is he?"

"I don't believe his own men could tell you, sir, for he goes masked, and robed in black, even covering up his horse from ears to tail."

"That is strange."

"It is the safest plan, sir."

"And who is driving now?"

"Harding, sir, the scout."

"A fine fellow; but I fear he will be killed as driver on that trail."

"I hope not, sir, and he has escaped splendidly through great dangers thus far."

"Well, what will be your plans now?"

"I have been hanging on the trail, sir, since my mysterious disappearance as Old Huckleberry, and have been hovering about the Death Line taking notes and seeing what I could discover."

"I have a camp in a basin in the mountain range, and there I left my pack-horse and outfit while I came here."

"You have something to report to me, then?"

"No, sir, not particularly, though I came for a purpose."

"And that purpose, Cody?"

"I was aware, sir, that Surgeon Frank Powell was coming to the fort, to relieve Dr. Dey, and that his duties as surgeon would not begin for some weeks yet."

"As we have been on so many scouting expeditions together, and Dr. Powell is a regiment in himself, I wanted him to go back with me and unearth these road-agents, following their trail to the very end."

"You could have no one better; what do you say, Powell?" said the major to the surgeon scout who was present at the interview.

"How could I refuse, major, after Bill's most flattering remarks about what I can do, and which prove he has Irish blood in his veins."

"Ah, I knew that you would go, Frank," responded Cody.

"Of course I will, and am ready when you say the word, only I must ask Major Randall for a leave, should we not accomplish our purpose before I am ordered for duty here."

"That will be all right, Powell; but when will you start, Cody, for Dr. Powell will have to first relieve Dr. Dey, as that would be the best plan, and then go, leaving his assistant surgeon in charge."

"It is for you to decide, major."

"Very well, say in just ten days from now."

"All right, sir; but, after a couple of days' rest I had better return to my basin camp, and be on the watch, and I can tell Surgeon Powell just where I will meet him upon a certain date."

"You know best, Cody; but do not venture much until Powell joins you, for well I know what a team you two make together."

"I feel certain, sir, that together we can run down these masked marauders," was the confident reply of Buffalo Bill, and when he went to his quarters soon after, Surgeon Powell accompanied him, for the two were the fastest of friends.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DRIVER'S LETTER.

After several days' stay at the fort Buffalo Bill started upon his return to his secret camp near Last Chance trail.

He carried with him another pack-horse, well laden with bedding and supplies, for the weather was growing steadily colder, and winter would soon be upon the land.

He knew that little snow generally fell as far down as the Last Chance trail, but it would be well to be prepared for any emergency, and as the coaches ran through the winter, the road-agents would by no means take a rest from their heinous work.

Riding leisurely on the back trail, not caring to push his horses too hard, Buffalo Bill reached his basin-camp in the mountains on the third day, and the animal he left there pranced like a colt at seeing him come back.

His first work was to make his quarters more secure and comfortable, and this took him a day, and the following, having strengthened the barrier in the pass, to prevent his horses from breaking out, he started off on foot for the W—— and Last Chance stage trail.

He would not ride, as he did not wish his trail to be seen by any prowling road-agents, and on foot he could accomplish more and be concealed far better than if he had gone mounted.

Before parting with Surgeon Frank Powell at the fort, Buffalo Bill had drawn a map of the country, marking the trail the Surgeon Scout was to follow, and also just where he was to meet him.

After a long scout of a mile he suddenly came upon a spot where there were the tracks of a horse visible.

These were followed a mile further, and the scout saw that the ground was trampled down, but not by hoofs.

The track he had followed thus far had been that of one hoof only, showing that the other three had been muffled, but one had lost its covering.

The trampled grass and ground revealed that the horses had been left there, and all had had their hoofs muffled in some way.

But the keen eyes of the scout picked up the trail and he followed it quite rapidly until he came to a small stream.

"There were eight horses along, as their tracks show here, but how many men I do not know.

"When they have gone some miles further they will remove the muffles from their horses' hoofs, and then the trail will be easy to follow, and it now looks to me as though I will be able to track them to their retreat, and that means the end.

"But night is coming on, and this is just the place for me to branch off and go to my own camp, following the trail to-morrow on horseback."

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE CLOVEN HOOFS.

Buffalo Bill quickly decided what course he would pursue.

He would walk to his camp, get some provisions and an increased outfit, return there for the balance of the night and go into camp, so as to make an early start in the morning directly on the trail.

So he set out at a rapid walk and within three hours' time had reached his basin-camp.

He quickly set to work to look up some provisions and get ready for his trail, and in an hour was ready to start, mounted upon his best horse.

It was after midnight when he reached his camping-place, but he was soon asleep, wrapped snugly in his blankets, while his horse was resting and feeding.

With the breaking of dawn he was up and ready to

start, and a few miles away discovered the spot where the outlaws had removed the muffles from the hoofs of their horses.

From there on he felt no further anxiety about the trail, so cooked his breakfast, ate it leisurely and again started on his way.

He understood now thoroughly why the outlaws had left no trails going to and coming from the Dead Line and other points on the Overland trail.

The muffled hoofs of the horses explained this, and they stuck to their determination to leave no tracks until they got far away from the scene of their evil deeds.

Buffalo Bill did not believe that he would have to go very far from the Dead Line before he found their retreat, and was expecting to find out where they were in hiding within half-a-day's ride from his starting point.

But noon came, and still the trail led him on.

He had plenty of time, so did not hurry.

He could do nothing alone, other than to discover the retreat, and then he would make for his rendezvous with the surgeon scout, and together they would plan their future movements.

But night came and found him still on the trail.

He was compelled to go into camp, for he could not follow it by night, and he soon made himself comfortable.

Again he started after daybreak, and a ride of several hours caused him to say:

"This trail is surely leading direct to the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

"Can they have sought that weird land for a retreat?—yet, why not, for no safer one could be found."

Within an hour more he felt that the country had a familiar look, and he was not long in discovering, upon riding a few miles further, that he had ridden right along there with Dr. Dick when on the trail of Andrew Seldon.

Suddenly he came upon the grand vista of the canyon and at once drew rein.

There before him was the mighty view that had so impressed him on his former visit, and he knew that the outlaws must have found a retreat in the depths somewhere of the Grand Canyon.

Not daring to go further on horseback he rode off the trail to find a hiding-place for his horse, and after a short search discovered a little glen where he felt that he would be safe, unless his trail was discovered and he was tracked there.

There was a pool of water in one end, and grass about it, so he staked his horse out, feeling that he could at least subsist comfortably there for a couple of days, should he be kept away that long.

Hiding his saddle and bridle, he set out on foot, with a couple of blankets strapped on his back, his bag of provisions, rifle, lasso and belt of arms.

He went back to the trail and again took it up where he had left it to hide his horse.

Every step forward now was one of caution, for the country was open in places, and he did not know what moment he might come upon a party of outlaws and have to fight for his life.

But he reached the rim of the canyon by dark, and a short search revealed to him that the trail down into the depths of the tremendous chasm had been discovered also by the road-agents, and their tracks led down into it.

The night passed with a cold supper and breakfast, and then he set off on foot down the dizzy pathway leading to the bottom of the canyon, for now he felt sure that he would discover the lair of the outlaws, and that done, and his own presence unknown to them, he could arrange for an attack upon them at his leisure.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MINER'S MISSION.

The gold-hunter, Andrew Seldon, rode on his way from his retreat in the canyon, determined to return to Fort Faraway and report the presence in the Grand Canyon of the masked outlaw band.

It was upon striking out for Fort Faraway that he suddenly drew his horse to a halt as he saw a dust far ahead.

The dust was approaching him, and it was made by horses crossing a sandy part of the country before him.

Out of the dust suddenly emerged a horseman, and behind him followed a pack animal.

Hidden in a clump of timber Andrew Seldon saw that it was a white man, and that the trail he was following would bring him near his position.

"I believe that it is Buffalo Bill," he muttered, as he saw that the horseman was clad in buckskin and wore his hair long.

But as he came nearer he said, eagerly:

"It is the Surgeon Scout—Dr. Frank Powell!"

The coming horseman eyed the timber carefully as he approached.

Something had evidently made him suspicious of danger there, and, turning to the left he was about to flank it, when Andrew Seldon rode into view and waved his hat.

Then he rode forward once more, but cautiously, for the chances were that the man he saw might be a foe, he well knew.

But Andrew Seldon raised his hands above his head as a token of peace, and Surgeon Powell rode straight toward him.

"I dare not let him know who I am, though I would trust him, heaven knows.

"He knows me as well as any man, and I'll see how I stand the test of his piercing eyes," muttered the gold-hunter, and as the Surgeon Scout drew nearer he called out:

"Are you Buffalo Bill, sir?"

"No, I am Surgeon Powell of the army."

"I see now, sir, that you are not Buffalo Bill, for I met him once when he was in a tight place with road-agents.

"Are you from Fort Faraway, sir?"

"I am."

"I was on my way there to see Buffalo Bill, when I say you coming, sir."

"And I am on my way to seek Buffalo Bill, for I have an appointment to meet him not many miles from here at a deserted camp, where there is a grave."

"I know it well, sir, for I made the grave, and I stopped there last night."

"You made what grave?"

"The grave of Black Heart Bill, the desperado, who is buried there."

"You killed him, you mean?"

"I did, sir, for he had wronged me greatly."

"Who are you, may I ask?"

"My name is Andrew Seldon, sir, and I am a miner."

"It seems to me that Buffalo Bill has spoken to me of you."

"Yes, sir."

"But Cody believes you to be dead."

"How so, sir?"

"He wished to find you, so tracked you into the Grand Canyon, to find your horse buried beneath a fallen cliff, and he thought you were beneath it all."

"No, sir; I escaped; but as you are going to seek Buffalo Bill may I join you?"

"You may," was the reply.

"You may join me, Mr. Seldon, and I shall be glad to have your company," repeated Surgeon Powell, as he rode along by the side of the gold-hunter.

"I will be your guide to the deserted camp, sir, but do you expect to find Mr. Cody there?"

"I hope so, but should he not be I shall await him."

"I am glad to hear you say that, sir, for I am most anxious to see him, and I will tell you why."

"If you care to."

"I know your secret, Surgeon Powell, and am delighted to feel that I will have your aid as well as Buffalo Bill's in what I wish to do."

"And what do you wish to do, Mr. Seldon?"

"I will have to ask you to keep my secret, sir."

"I will do so."

"Well, Surgeon Powell, I am a miner, and I strolled into the Grand Canyon of the Colorado in my prospecting tours, and there discovered several rich gold claims.

"While I was away at W—— to get provisions, my partner heard the cliff above our camp cracking, and so moved away up the canyon to another mine we had.

"He was just in time to save his life, for the cliff fell, and Buffalo Bill was in the valley that night with a comrade and heard the terrific roar of the falling cliff.

"They believed that my comrade and myself were buried beneath the mountain of rock, but we were gazing at them the while and watched them ride away.

"Some time after I found that others had come into the canyon, and I discovered that it was a camp of outlaws, while more still, I saw that they had a female captive.

"I crept near enough at night to hear and see all, and I saw a young and beautiful girl, and the outlaw lieutenant held her a captive for his chief, until a large ransom was paid for her by the miners of Last Chance.

"I at once decided to act, and having seen them start with her to give up for ransom, I came on my way to find Buffalo Bill and guide him to the retreat of the outlaws.

"That young girl, sir, gave the name of Celeste Seldon, so is my daughter.

"Now, Surgeon Powell, you have my story, and my comrade is in my camp, awaiting my return!"

Frank Powell was greatly impressed with the story of the gold-hunter, to which he had listened with the deepest attention.

After he had heard all he said:

"My dear pard, you have made a very valuable discovery indeed, and Buffalo Bill will be only too glad to have you guide him to the outlaw camp, for that is his mission and mine here.

"I sincerely hope that your daughter will be given up in safety to the miners, and that her ransom will be recovered."

"She will be given up in safety, sir, I am certain, for I have perfect confidence in the outlaw lieutenant, who told his story to Celeste, and I only ask that he may not share the fate of the other outlaws," and the gold hunter made known what had occurred between Wolf and Celeste, and Dr. Powell replied:

"I agree with you, and if he acts squarely toward Miss Seldon, I will urge that he be allowed to go free, when his comrades are to hang."

When the Surgeon Scout was guided to the deserted camp by Andrew Seldon, he at once saw that Buffalo Bill had not reached there.

But there he was to wait for him, and so the horses were staked out and the two made themselves at home there.

Dr. Powell went to have a look at the grave of Black Heart Bill, an outlaw who had once attacked Buffalo Bill and had been killed, and the inscription upon the *white bark of the aspen tree*, and said, as he read the name:

"Hugh Mayhew was his name."

"Yes, sir."

"There was a Sergeant Manton Mayhew killed at Fort Faraway by Sergeant Wallace Weston, who was sentenced to be shot for the deed, but escaped the very moment of his execution."

"Was he ever captured, sir?"

"Poor fellow, he went to an even worse fate than being shot, for he wandered into the desert and died of starvation there.

"I know that he was guilty of killing Manton Mayhew, but I am sure he had some grave reason for so doing, but which he would never make known.

"He was a splendid soldier, brave and true, and he would have been commissioned had not that sad affair occurred."

"Did he give no reason for his act, sir?"

"None; he simply accepted his fate, though it was said to clear himself he would have to compromise others, and this he would not do."

"Poor fellow!"

"Yes, I often think of his sad fate."

An antelope was killed that afternoon, and after enjoying a good supper the surgeon and the gold-hunter lighted their pipes and sat down for a talk, both anxiously awaiting the coming of Buffalo Bill.

After sitting in silence for some minutes the gold-hunter said:

"Surgeon Powell, you were speaking of Wallace Weston to-day?"

"Yes."

"You may have noted that the name of Mayhew is upon yonder aspen tree?"

"And referred to the fact."

"I put it there."

"Yes."

"Then I knew who Black Heart Bill was."

"That is so."

"I had not thought of that."

"He was the brother of Manton Mayhew, the sergeant."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

"You knew Sergeant Mayhew, then?"

"Intimately, for we were boys together."

"Ah! tell me of him."

"We lived near each other, sir, and Manton Mayhew was my rival at school, and also for the love of a pretty girl whom I idolized.

"He did all in his power to ruin me, and when I obtained a position in a bank, where he also was a clerk, he did wreck my life, for I was accused of robbery, and worse still of murdering the watchman, who caught me in the act.

"I would surely have been hanged but for the girl I spoke of, who forced me to fly for my life, aiding me to escape.

"I fled, to prove my innocence, and became a wanderer.

"Then I received a letter from the woman I loved, telling me that she had discovered that I really was a thief and murderer, and that she abhorred where she had loved me.

"And more, when, in my despair I wrote to one who had been my friend to hear from home, I was told that Manton Mayhew had been the means of ruining my father financially, and the blow had driven him to suicide, while my poor mother, heart-broken, had died soon after my flight.

"Nor was this all, for Hugh Mayhew, the brother of Manton, had married the girl I had loved.

"Several years after other news came to me from my old home, and to the effect that Brandon Mayhew had gone to the bad and in a drunken brawl had wounded a companion fatally as he had believed, and he had fled, no one knew where.

"His brother Hugh had wrecked his father's bank, and in a drunken frenzy had shot his wife one night, and he, too, had become a fugitive.

"Well, to end the story quickly, for I hate to dwell upon it, Manton Mayhew had joined the army, and, a good soldier, had become a sergeant.

"Ordered to Fort Faraway, he had met there Sergeant Weston, whom he recognized, and fearing to be exposed in his crimes, he at once attacked him, telling him he would kill him and say that it was on account of his insubordination.

"But Wallace Weston was armed, having just been given a revolver by an officer to take to his quarters, and he killed Mayhew as he was about to drive a knife to his heart.

"Rather than bring out the old story, and perhaps be carried back East to be tried for the murder of the bank watchman, of which he was innocent, Sergeant Wallace Weston submitted in silence to his trial and accepted his fate, feeling that his life was one of despair."

CHAPTER XV.

WALLACE WESTON STILL ALIVE.

"And do you know all this to be as you have stated?" asked Surgeon Powell, when the gold-hunter had finished his story.

"I do, sir."

"Knowing it, you did not come to the rescue of poor Weston?"

"I did not, sir."

"May I ask why?" and Frank Powell spoke sternly.

"I will tell you the reason, Surgeon Powell, if you will pledge me your word to receive it in sacred confidence."

"I will pledge myself, Mr. Seldon."

"Because, sir, I am Wallace Weston."

Frank Powell was always a calm, cool man, but now he sprang to his feet, dropping his pipe, and cried:

"Do you speak the truth?"

"I do, sir."

"Upon honor?"

"Yes."

"Now I recognize the look that has so haunted me since I met you this morning.

"Upon my soul, Weston, I am glad to see that you are not dead, that you can clear up the story of Mayhew's killing and announce yourself once more as a guiltless man."

"But I cannot, sir, for you forget that I am accused of murdering the watchman and robbing the bank."

"Is there no way in which you can disprove that?"

"Only by the confession of the guilty ones."

"Who were they?"

"The Mayhews and one other."

"They were guilty?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who was the other one?"

"A clerk in the bank and a devoted friend of the Mayhews."

"Where is he?"

"I do not know, sir."

"And they are dead."

"Manton and Hugh Mayhew are dead, by my hand, but where proof of their crime can be found I cannot tell, and so I am forced to hide under an assumed name—yes, Dr. Powell, the name of a dead man, Andrew Seldon, the one whose body was found by the rock in the desert and buried for mine."

"You have had a remarkable escape, Weston——"

"Seldon now, sir, for that is the name I have taken, and let me now tell you how that poor man, the real Andrew Seldon, was plotted against."

"I shall be glad to hear all that you are willing to tell me, Seldon."

"Well, sir, it was while escaping from the pursuing soldiers that I came upon a stray horse.

"He led me back to where his dead master lay upon the desert, and upon the body I found papers telling who he was, that he had left home under a cloud, and came West to hide himself and hunt for gold until he dared return.

"There was a map of some gold fields he had discovered, and he had struck it rich and was on his way home.

"So I dressed him in my uniform, took his traps, and went my way, and he was buried as Wallace Weston.

"It was when I was returning to the gold find of Andrew Seldon that I came upon Black Heart Bill's camp, and finding in him Hugh Mayhew, I killed him.

"My intention was to take Andrew Seldon's name, dig his gold, and, to ease my conscience, gave half to his family.

"I imitated his writing and wrote to his lawyer and best friend, and little daughter, for his wife was dead, as letters told me which he had with him.

"In answer, at W—— I learned that I, as Andrew Seldon, dared not return home, that my daughter Celeste was dead, and my fortune gone.

"When Celeste Seldon was captured, from her own lips I learned, as she told the outlaw lieutenant, that all had been a plot to keep her father away, and discovering the plot, she had come out here to find him, after the messenger had failed to write home to her later than on his arrival in W——.

"Now, you know, Dr. Powell, why I was seeking Buffalo Bill, and it is my intention to seek that young girl, tell her all, and give her one-half of the fortune in gold I have found, through her father's maps and directions, in the Grand Canyon."

"And then?"

"I suppose I shall drift about the world, sir, unknown, leading an aimless life, or perhaps return to my gold-digging again."

"No, Weston, such must not be your fate, for I shall take your case in hand and prove your innocence of robbing that bank and killing the watchman, for I believe your story, and then with Sergeant Mayhew's character proven, you can readily secure pardon for taking his life as you did in self-defense."

"Heaven bless you, Surgeon Powell!"

"I only make one request, Weston."

"Yes, sir."

"That Buffalo Bill hears your story as I have, for he believes in your innocence most thoroughly, and will be most happy to welcome you back to life."

"I will be guided by you, sir, but some one is coming."

"It is Buffalo Bill," cried Frank Powell, and just then the scout rode into the camp.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OUTLAW'S CONFESSION.

When Buffalo Bill went on his way down into the Grand Canyon, he continued on until he discovered just where the outlaws had made their retreat.

This done, he retraced his way as rapidly as possible, and at once went back on the trail to where he had left his horse.

The sun was just setting as he neared the spot, and he approached carefully, for he was not sure that some one had not been there and discovered the animal.

Just as he caught sight of his horse he also saw there was some one there, a horseman who had just ridden up to the spot.

The face of the horseman was masked and this told the story in an instant.

But Buffalo Bill had been also discovered, and up to the outlaw's shoulder went his rifle, at the same instant that the weapon of the scout was leveled.

The two rifles cracked almost as one, and the outlaw reeled, tried to spur his horse in flight and fell to the ground.

The scout at once advanced toward him, revolver in hand, when in faint voice came the words:

"Don't fire again! Your shot is fatal!"

The scout put his revolver in his belt, bent over and took the mask from the face of the wounded man, his horse following him to the spot.

The face revealed was not a bad one, but that of a man of thirty, with mustache, imperial and hair worn long.

The scout placed him at length upon his back, and made

him as comfortable as he could, for he saw that he had told the truth, that the wound he had received was fatal.

Then he sat by the side of the wounded man for a while, the light of the full moon falling full in his face, and the scout heard him say:

"I am glad that I missed you; for I have done evil enough in my time."

"Who are you?" kindly asked the scout.

"My name is Alvin Wolf, and I had just resolved to lead a different life, for I am an outlaw, one of the masked chief's band."

"Yes, I thought as much."

"I changed my life when I met a young girl who was the chief's captive, and I intended to thwart his plans to again capture her, for we gave her up for ransom two days ago, and, acting for him, I received the gold."

"He gave me a written order to take the gold to a spot near Last Chance and turn it over to him, which I did last night, for he met me there, and then he arranged to get a large ransom for a poor crazy fellow, the lover of the young girl, I believe, and so I had decided to act to protect her; but you can do so now, for I will tell you all, and then I can die content."

"Yes, it is best to die with a free conscience."

"I believe you, and more, I will tell you of one whom I helped to ruin in life, though he is dead now."

"He was a soldier at Fort Faraway, and his name was Wallace Weston."

"We were boys together, though he was older than I, and I was led into temptation by others, the Mayhew brothers, and we robbed the bank we were working in, were discovered by the watchman, and Manton Mayhew killed him, and we had so planned that the robbery would fall upon the assistant cashier, Wallace Weston."

"He fled, for we intended to hang him by our testimony, and then Hugh Mayhew forged letters and caused his sweetheart to believe him guilty, and she married him, Mayhew, to in the end lose her life at his hands."

"Manton Mayhew always swore to me that he would kill Weston if he ever met him, and he said he heard he was in the army, and so, I suppose, when they met at Fort Faraway, he attempted to do so, and was killed himself."

"Poor Weston did not dare tell of the past, so had to suffer; but you can make the real truth known to clear his name, for I have it all written out as it is in my diary, which I have always carried with me, and will now give to you."

"I am glad to learn all this; but let me ask you about your outlaw band?"

"Yes."

"How many are in it?"

"Nine, without counting the chief."

"Your retreat is in the Grand Canyon."

"You know this?"

"I do."

"Yes, our retreat is there."

"And your chief?"

The outlaw did not reply, and a shudder passed through his frame.

The scout spoke again, and leaning over he heard a few whispered words from the dying lips which a moment after were sealed forever by death.

CHAPTER XVII.

UNMASKED.

When Buffalo Bill rode into the camp where Surgeon Powell and the gold-hunter sat, it was seen that he was leading two horses, one carrying a pack-saddle, the other a heavy load.

The Surgeon Scout at once arose and greeted him, and said:

"Ho, Bill, what game is that?"

"A dead outlaw, the lieutenant of the band, whom I killed.

"But you are not alone, Frank?"

"No, it is your old rescuer, who was on his way to the fort to see you, when he met me.

"He was going to tell you that the outlaws have their retreat in the Grand Canyon."

"I have been to it; but how are you, Pard Seldon, and let me say that I have good news for you, as your daughter has come West to meet you and is now at Last Chance."

"Thank you, Mr. Cody, but I am aware of that fact, as Surgeon Powell can tell you; but come, look me squarely in the face, and see if you know who I am."

Buffalo Bill gave a fixed look and then cried, excitedly:

"By the gods of war, you are Wallace Weston, or his ghost."

"I am a very healthy ghost, sir; but I am Wallace Weston, and I leave it to Surgeon Powell to tell my story to you."

The scout seized the gold-hunter's hand and wrung it hard while he said:

"Thank God you are not dead, Weston, for only this night have I heard the truth of your story from the lips of the dying outlaw, Alvin Wolf."

"Ha! once my friend, then my foe, for he sided with the Mayhews against me."

"He did, and I have his diary, which tells the whole story; but now let me tell mine, and then we can compare notes and decide what is best to be done."

They first had supper, after staking out their horses, and afterward buried the body of the outlaw, Alvin Wolf.

There, until after midnight, they sat talking together, the surgeon, the scout and the gold-hunter, about all that had happened, after which they retired to their blankets.

It was just dawn the next morning when Wallace Weston rode away from the old camp to make all speed to Last Chance.

His mission there was to take a letter to driver Harding, which was as follows:

"Trust the bearer with your life—Pick out eight of the best men in the camp, whom you can trust, and have them pretend to start for W—— on business, going in your coach.

"See that no one else goes.

"Have two leaders that are good saddle-horses, and smuggle into the coach seven saddles.

"I will meet you at Dead Line with horses, and prepare to lose your leaders then, for four horses can readily pull your empty coach on to W——.

"Your men must be the best, and fully armed.

"Yours,

"B. B.

"The Beaver will bring your answer to me."

Pushing rapidly on Wallace Weston arrived in Last Chance that night and at once sought out Harding.

Giving him his letter, he received his answer, after the two had a talk together, and then, mounted upon a fresh horse furnished him by the driver, he started upon his return, having attracted no particular attention.

It was the next day that the coach rolled out for W—— and it carried eight miners as passengers.

Arriving at Dead Line, it was met there by Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell and Wallace Weston, and the eight miners joined them and went up to the scout's basin-camp.

Then, with the two leaders taken from Harding's coach, they had, with Wolf's horses and the pack-animals, enough to mount the party.

The next morning the start was made for the Grand Canyon, and the descent was made on foot in the darkness of night, the horses having been left on the rim.

The party was led by Wallace Weston, who knew the trail perfectly, and at midnight they rushed in upon the outlaw camp, giving them a complete surprise.

Revolvers rattled, cries of alarm and pain were heard, cheers were given and then silence reigned supreme, for the battle was won and four outlaws had been made prisoners—the rest were killed.

One miner had been killed, and others wounded, though slightly, and these were cared for by Dr. Powell.

In the camp, a prisoner, Bernard Brandon was found safe, but still unconscious of all about him, apparently.

Wallace Weston had asked Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell to go on with him to his camp, and there they found Lucas Langley on guard, he having heard the echoes of the firing far down the canyon, and supposed that it meant an attack planned by his pard.

Without letting the secret be known, that there was gold in the canyon, Buffalo Bill ordered an early start for Last Chance and it was made by all except Lucas Langley, who remained at his cabin to await Weston's return.

Upon nearing Last Chance Buffalo Bill halted the party, to follow on a few hours later, while he rode on with Surgeon Powell and Wallace Weston.

The scout was recognized by the miners and warmly greeted, and as he dismounted at the hotel and was welcomed by Landlord Larry, and Harding, who had returned, Dr. Dick came forward and said:

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Cody, again in Last Chance."

"Yes, Dr. Dick, I am here to find Richard Mayhew, alias Dr. Dick, and more still, the masked chief of the road-agents—hold! you are covered!"

But Dr. Dick saw that all was lost, saw that the rope would be his end, and in spite of the warning of the scout, he drew his revolver.

But ere his finger touched the trigger he fell, a dead man, at the feet of Buffalo Bill, Celeste Seldon having come forward just in time to see the gambler gold king fall his length upon the earth.

To the excited miners Buffalo Bill turned and made a speech, for he had killed their hero, the idol of Last Chance.

He told them how the mask of the gambler gold king had been torn off, by the confession of the outlaw lieutenant, Alvan Wolf, and how he had had his suspicions aroused, as had also Landlord Larry and Harding, by several things that had occurred, that Dr. Dick was not all he pretended to be.

The whole story was made known, and as the rest of the party came in, bearing the booty of the outlaws and the prisoners, and in Dr. Dick's cabin was found the very bag of gold that had been given for Celeste Seldon's ransom, and the money before taken from the coach, there was no doubting his guilt, and a howl of rage arose against him and his followers.

Later, while Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell, Wallace Weston and Landlord Larry were at Celeste Seldon's cabin, telling her the true story regarding her father, the storm broke in fury and Harding rushed in to say that the miners had seized the outlaw prisoners and were hanging them.

An attempted rescue was made by Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill, but in vain; that mob would not, could not, be stayed in its madness and the work of revenge was accomplished.

The next day, as Surgeon Powell had said that the reason of Bernard Brandon could be restored by an operation, Celeste begged him to make the attempt, and to the joy of all it was crowned with perfect success.

With his reason once on its throne again, and learning all that had taken place, Bernard Brandon told how he had been the young partner of Lawyer Edgar Stone, who had kept his friend, Andrew Seldon, away from home by false letters, had written him that Celeste was dead, intending in the end to marry her and get the large fortune for himself, for the estate had greatly increased in value since the departure of its owner.

He had at last decided to go to Celeste and confess all, and learning that he had done so, Edgar Stone had fled to save imprisonment.

In atonement Bernard Brandon had come West to find Andrew Seldon, and not hearing from him, Celeste had followed him with the results now known to the reader.

Bernard Brandon hoped that his atonement might win the heart of Celeste, but instead she had dismissed him with liberal payment and placed herself under the guardianship of Wallace Weston, who had taken her father's name.

Bidding adieu to their pards at Last Chance, after sending Harding to the Grand Canyon to join Lucas Langley at the mine, Wallace Weston went East with Celeste, and going to his old home, he told the whole story of his life, and submitted letters from Dr. Powell, Buffalo Bill, and the diary of the outlaw officer as proof of his innocence, so that the charges against him were at once ended by legal process.

Armed with proper papers, he presented himself before the president, and received his pardon, after which, with Celeste Seldon as Mrs. Wallace Weston, he went to Fort Faraway and received a welcome from all his old officers and comrades that made his heart glad.

As the mines in the Grand Canyon had ceased panning out as expected, Wallace Weston gave up his interest there to Lucas Langley and Harding, and returned East with his beautiful wife, both of them more than content never to again visit the Wild West, though they have never forgotten Buffalo Bill and his wizards of the war-path.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 71) will contain, "Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake; or, Hunting the Paradise Gold Mine."

The Sweepstake was a pretty wide, clean sweep—and swept all before it, and the Paradise Gold Mine was a prize well worth winning. Look out for the story, for it will open your eyes in regards to some things concerning frontier life. It contains accounts of some of the liveliest adventures the Wizard of the Trail, Buffalo Bill, ever had. It will also contain some previous portions of the lives of Dr. Dick and Wallace Weston, which will make thrilling reading. How Wallace Weston found the mine in the Grand Canyon is an interesting story, and will be told next week.



THRILLING ADVENTURE



Look on page 31, boys. Isn't that new contest a bird? Get into it. The entries are beginning to put in an appearance already. We'll begin to print them in a couple of weeks. In the meantime we are printing a few of the bunch of good stories left over from the contest just closed. Prize-winners to be announced next week.

My Adventure on a Day's Hunt.

(By Geo. Levy, N. Y.)

It was about ten years ago when often I had the privilege of going out to hunt or fish as I wished.

This day I happened to be out hunting, and just as I was nearing a small river which was frequently visited by deer and other such game, I saw something peering out of the bushes on the other side of the river.

At first I did not know what to do, but I managed to get aim at his chest, and I shot. The animal bounded up and down and ran for about two rods and fell, kicking, so I took one more shot and that settled him.

I then started to skin him, which was easy for me, as I watched my uncle many a time. I was about halfway through when I heard a rustling right behind me; with a quick glance I turned around to behold a large fox; at first I became a bit afraid, but I got enough courage and looked him square in the eye and he turned around and fled.

I went after my gun and fired, but missed my mark. I then resumed my task and was soon on my way home. I related my adventure to my parents and since that time I have always had some one with me.

Saved from a Terrible Death.

(By Clayton Burdick, Wis.)

I am a boy of sixteen, learning the painters' trade from a man who made his living by painting chimneys and cupolas on factories.

As these were very high he used to make sure of not having an accident by tying the end of a rope around his body and throwing the other end, which had a grapple-hook fastened to it, over the top of the cupola, but an accident happened just the same.

One day as he was painting and I was mixing paint on the ground, I was startled by the ladder falling about five

feet from me, and on looking up I saw Mr. Delmar, the painter, dangling at the end of the rope and striking the hot cupola.

Quick as thought I replaced the ladder and, running up, I caught hold of him and held him as far away as possible, and then cutting the rope I descended, assisting him down, for he was nearly unconscious.

When I reached the ground I found he was burned severely, and calling aid, we took him to the hospital, where he was taken care of, but was not able to leave for about four months, and at one time it was feared he would die.

As for myself, I received a few slight burns, but none of them were dangerous.

A Battle at the Rapids.

(By Harry Scott, Pa.)

One warm and sultry day, in the latter part of July, in the year '98, three companions and myself went out to Bridgewater dam, for a swim. After having lots of fun above the dam, jumping and diving, I left my friends and went down to the dam, and it was then that I had my narrow escape.

There had been a heavy rainstorm that morning, and the dam resembled the Niagara Falls, only it was a miniature one.

There was a row of planks running across the creek at the bottom of the dam, and they extended out about six feet. The water fell over the dam about seven feet, onto these planks and then rushed off down the creek, making what I called the rapids.

I sat in back of the falls for a while and then, rushing out through the sheet of water, I dove off the edge of the planks into the seething rapids. Coming up, I struck out with an overhand stroke for where it was shallow. Instead of getting out and walking back along the bank, I thought I would swim back to the planks.

This was easy for me on most days when the waters were not so swift. I started back to the planks, swimming hard so as not to get carried back.

It was an awful fight, and I was played out before I reached the platform. The boards were wet and slimy, and just as I laid my hand on one, the current swept me back. Being played out, I couldn't do a thing, so down I went, getting my mouth full of water. I came up and went for them again, but it was no use.

Just as I was about to shout for my companions, I went down again, this time getting so much water, that I was choked.

I have often heard that when a person is drowning, they think of a lot of things, and I know that it is true.

I was struck with the idea that I ought to go with the current instead of fighting against it. This I did, and when I arrived where I could touch bottom, I said to myself: "Thank the Lord."

I assure you that I have never repeated the trick.

How I Saved the Horses.

(By Carl Pritchard, Wis.)

About seven of my chums and myself had decided to go camping at Trout Lake, which is about twenty-eight miles from our town.

We were to start on Monday morning, but it rained that day and Tuesday also, but on Wednesday everything was all right, and we loaded the wagon and hitched up the two heavy team horses to our traveling home.

The roads were very muddy and sticky on account of the rain, so we were only able to go at a slow rate of speed. We had gone about twenty miles when darkness overtook us.

We debated whether to go ahead or camp where we were for the night.

The majority were in favor of pushing on, so we did. We had gone about a mile through the darkness when I felt the lines snapped from my hands, and the horses gave a great plunge into a torrent of water, pulling the wagon after them.

The boys jumped and swam for shore, though I called loudly for help from them.

My first thought was of the horses, so I swam for their heads and after getting my knife open I cut the harness which held the horses to the wagon, and headed them for shore. They pulled me with them, where I was hauled out by the boys, and then, of course, our journey was put off, so we camped in the water instead of dry land.

An Adventure With a Bear.

(By James Lawson, W. Va.)

It was in the fall of 1898, that my uncle and I proposed taking a bear hunt in the Upine Mountains, in Greenbrier County, W. Va. So one bright morning in early November, we packed our camping outfit and started.

We arrived there the next day, and immediately pitched our tent, and cooked our supper. It was fortunate for us that we brought plenty of blankets, for that night about two inches of snow fell. We were up early the next morning, got our breakfast, and with our repeating rifles, sallied forth in pursuit of bear. We had not gone

far when their signs became visible in the snow. Leaving my uncle, I started up a deep hollow.

I had not gone far when I came suddenly upon the object of my hunt. Standing not over forty yards from me was a huge black bear. My first impulse was to run, but thinking of the parting taunts from the boys at home of what I would do if I saw a bear, I raised my rifle to my shoulder and with a nervous finger I pulled the trigger.

A savage growl answered my shot, and with the blood streaming from his mouth, where my bullet had hit him, he came at me.

I screamed for help, and turned and fled as fast as my trembling limbs would carry me.

Turning my head I saw the bear not five feet behind me. Throwing my gun away I strained every nerve in me, but the next instant something struck me in the back and almost knocked me senseless.

I lay thus for a moment, and feeling something warm dropping in my face I opened my eyes.

The sight which met my view froze every drop of blood in my veins, for, standing over me was the bear I had wounded, his hot breath steaming in my face. I gave all up for lost, expecting each second to feel his sharp teeth crush into my face. I closed my eyes awaiting my end, when—"Crack!"—a rifle report rang out, and the next instant a heavy body fell on my legs.

With a bound I was on my feet and looking up I saw my uncle standing above me. He had heard the report of my rifle and arrived just in time to save my life. His bullet had gone clean through the bear's heart.

We stayed two days longer, but with no more success. I have the bear's hide now in my room, and when I look at it now, it causes a feeling of nervousness to come over me.

The Foot In the Frog.

(By Robert Calhoun, Pa.)

One Sunday afternoon about a year ago, while strolling along the tracks of the B. & O. Railroad, near the outskirts of the town, I met with a thrilling escape from death that I will long remember. I often stroll along the railroad, and have a great habit of walking the rail, which I was doing at this time.

I had walked for quite a distance, and not noticing that I was near a switch, glanced up for an instant to see if any trains were near.

It was almost a fatal glance, for I slipped, my foot going into the frog where it remained fast, with a train not over one-fourth of a mile away, bearing down toward me with almost the speed of lightning.

I was horror stricken for a moment, and pulled and jerked for dear life, but thinking of the terrible danger, I regained my self-possession, and, plunging my hand into my jacket, I grasped a knife which opened with a spring, and which fortunately was very sharp.

On touching the spring the blade flew open, and stooping down I made a quick slash with the knife, and cut the lace of my shoe from top to bottom. I pulled my foot free and stepped back just in time to miss the thundering locomotive, which passed me like a flash.

The engineer had used almost superhuman efforts to stop the engine, but did not succeed until he was almost

one hundred feet past me, not knowing that I was fast until it was too late.

After congratulating me on my escape, he resumed his journey, and on recovering my shoe I resumed mine.

An Adventure With a Highwayman.

(By William O'Connor, N. Y.)

A year ago last August, I was spending two weeks vacation in Saratoga. I was stopping at a cottage which is situated on York avenue near the Ten Spring Woods, which is a very quiet and lonely neighborhood at night, and a very good place for a hold-up.

One night I was coming home from a concert in Congress park, when about half a block from where I lived, a man who was walking down the avenue, stopped me and pulled a small revolver out of his coat pocket and told me to put up my hands and be quiet.

I was very much frightened, but did not lose my head, and did as he told me, but just then a thought came to me which I remembered reading in a book which told what a man should do in a case like this.

The man had just gone through my pockets and was going to take my watch, when I nodded, making him believe there was some one in back of him, he saw me do it and looked around.

This was just the chance I was looking for. I gave him a blow with all my strength on the point of the jaw, which dazed him, and gave me a chance to run home safely.

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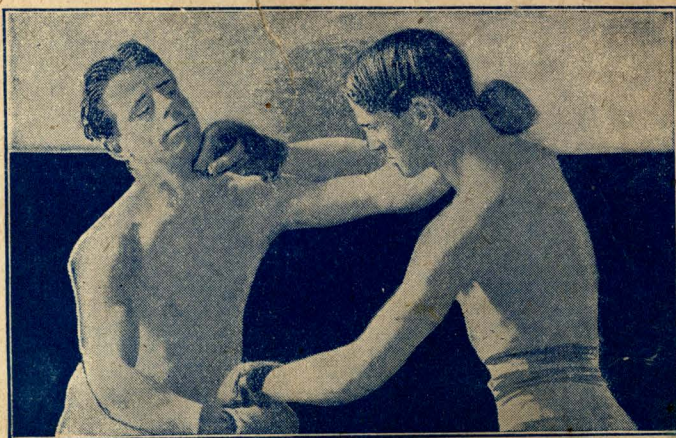
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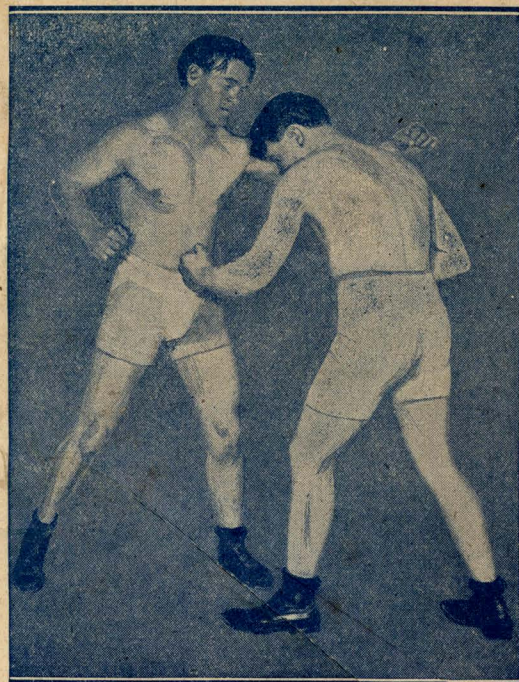
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